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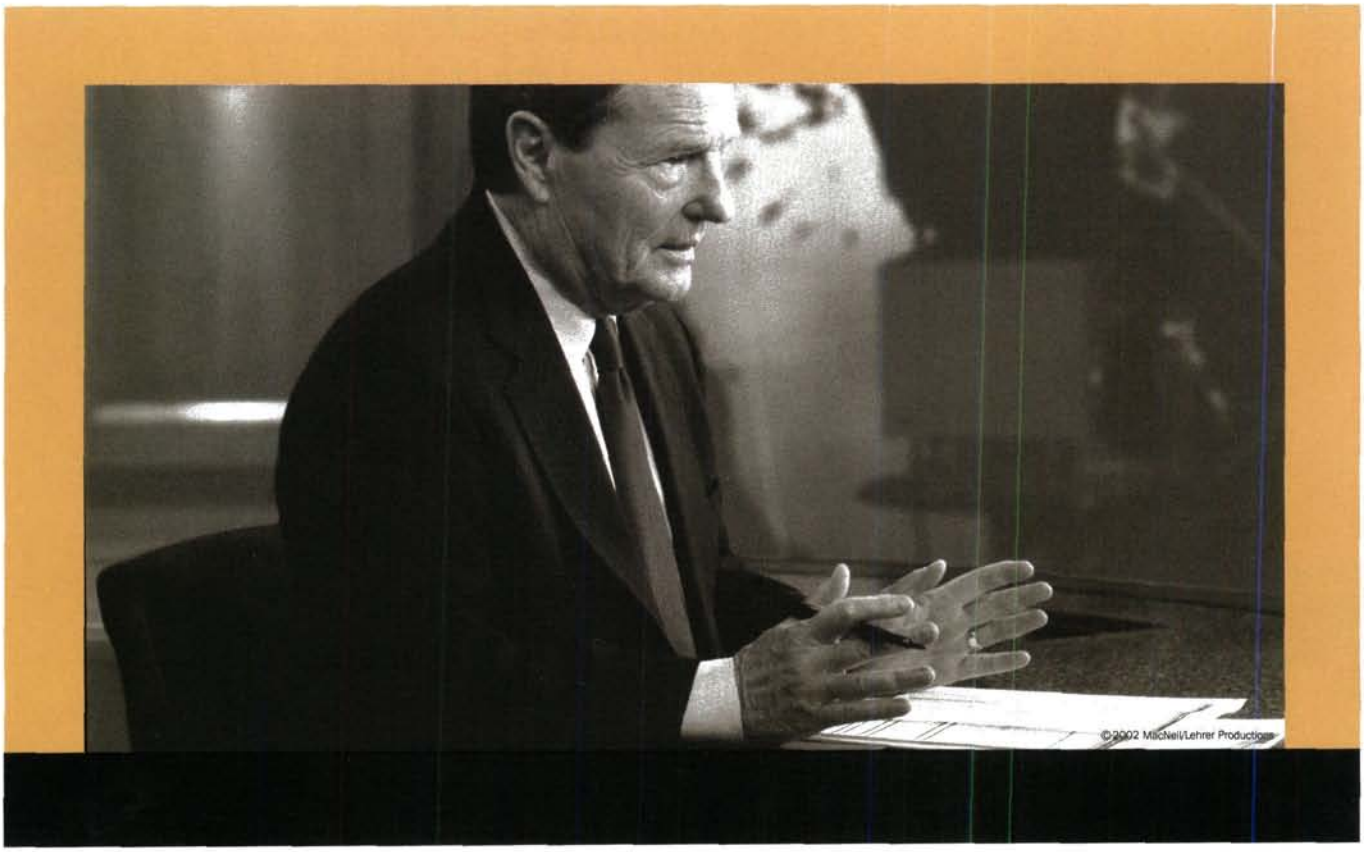

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A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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Neutered

TO THE EDITORS:

I enjoyed Jonathan Cohn's article about Michigan gubernatorial candidate Jennifer Granholm ("Gender Bender," October 14). However, I question Cohn's observation that the most remarkable thing about Granholm's campaign is that she is running like a man for governor. Think back to the late Ella Grasso of Connecticut: She not only ran like a man but also paid her dues at several levels of public office. Now, those men who are running for office on issues such as education, child care, and health care—are they running like women? Maybe women's issues are really *people's* issues, and maybe the voters are beginning to understand the difference.

MARY HUGHES BOYCE GELFMAN
Ridgefield, Connecticut

Legally speaking

TO THE EDITORS:

Michelle Cottle, in "Private Practice," cites only law professors to support her claim that "reform-minded lawyers" favor eroding attorney-client privilege (October 14). Lawyers and law professors are two entirely different things. For most faculty-hiring committees today, it seems as though significant experience practicing the law virtually disqualifies a candidate; and it seems law professors make their careers only by saying something new or different, no matter how outlandish.

As practicing lawyers know, everyday lawyers in private practice enforce more laws than a hundred Securities and Exchange Commissions could ever hope to do. Lawyers have this opportunity to counsel their clients to follow the law only because their clients feel free to confide in them, secure in the knowledge that the attorney-client privilege will protect their confidences.

GEORGE A. DAVIDSON
New York, New York

Uninspired

TO THE EDITORS:

I am willing to believe that Francine Prose's *The Lives of the Muses* is a bad book ("Art With the Proper Stranger," October 14). Harder to believe is THE NEW REPUBLIC's decision to allow Terry Castle 15 columns in which to sneer at it. Prose has written at least half a dozen intelligent, insightful novels and deserves respect, even from a reviewer who vehemently disagrees with her. Castle's dislike for the book—perhaps a result of Prose's

FALL BOOKS Robert Brustein, Terry Castle, Larry McMurtry, Alan Wolfe, Ruth Franklin
THE
UNFEMININE MYSTIQUE
Jennifer Granholm and the New Breed of Woman Candidate
JONATHAN COHN

"post-feminis[m]" and lack of interest in "same-sex muses"?—carries her beyond vehemence to insult and derision. TNR is wrong to confuse a mean-spirited rant with a review.

ANNE HIMMELFARB
Silver Spring, Maryland

Bad chemistry

TO THE EDITORS:

Gregg Easterbrook argues that chemical and biological weapons should not be considered weapons of mass destruction ("Term Limits," October 7). But his misunderstanding of these technologies undermines his conclusions. Easterbrook claims that the United States embargoed chlorine-gas exports to Iraq in order to prevent Iraqi use of this World War I-era "gas." Wrong. Chlorine is used to make potent organophosphate agents—highly toxic compounds (often used in pesticides) that, unregulated, can severely harm the central nervous system—which is why chlorine shipments were restricted.

Next, Easterbrook insists that mustard gas and sarin would make poor weapons against troops since they won't result in massive civilian casualties. Wrong again. Mustard gas has killed thousands. Sarin disables soldiers by forcing them to don cumbrous chemical suits. Sarin is also ineffective as a spray but is a dastardly weapon when delivered in bombs or artillery projectiles.

I, Zelicoff, have analyzed the raw data from the long-buried 1971 Soviet official report of the Aralsk smallpox outbreak. This epidemic occurred despite efforts to prevent an outbreak; that's why the test was carried out on a remote island in the Aral Sea. Unfortunately, during the

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aerosol testing of weaponized smallpox (a mere 400 grams was used in the test), a research vessel floated downwind—within 15 to 30 kilometers of the testing zone. That a woman on the ship was infected shows just how potent the strain and its dispersal techniques were. Returning home to Aralsk, this woman passed the virus on to nine other people—six of whom had been vaccinated as well. The three unvaccinated people died of virulent hemorrhagic smallpox. Only a heroic quarantine effort stopped its spread. How can this incident be compared to a deliberate bioterror release of smallpox, possibly in several different locations?

The "large quantity" of anthrax released in the Sverdlovsk incident was certainly less than one pound. The release happened because a technician forgot to replace a clogged filter. Dropping a few grams of anthrax into a few envelopes and mailing them off is not terribly "systematic." Had the terrorist intended to kill many people, he certainly could have done a more creditable job of it. The failure of Aum Shinrikyo and their "skilled scientists" to infect even one person with the anthrax they spread around Tokyo can perhaps be attributed to their use of the Sterne vaccine strain instead of virulent anthrax. How many people they accidentally succeeded in immunizing remains unknown.

The failure of Ebola Reston, the strain let loose near Washington, to kill even a single person is fortunate for those involved but not really very telling. Ebola Reston does not cause disease in people, and few experts believe that Ebola would be a useful biological weapon.

Finally, the Japanese did not stop their plague bombs on China because "plague-infected drinking water was infecting their own soldiers." Plague does not spread in water. However, plague—when aerosolized—causes pneumonic plague, which kills almost 100 percent of untreated people. Further, Soviets developed a strain resistant to ten antibiotics. The technology exists, and it has for 30 years.

Dismissing the threat of technologies one doesn't understand is foolish—and very dangerous.

WENDY ORENT, PH.D.
Atlanta, Georgia
ALAN ZELICOFF, M.D.
Senior Scientist
Sandia National Laboratories
Albuquerque, New Mexico

GREGG EASTERBROOK REPLIES:
The writers assert, "Easterbrook insists that mustard gas and sarin would make poor weapons against troops since they won't result in massive civilian casualties." Not only can I find no statement remotely resembling this in the article in question, I can't even figure out what the statement means. Who would think that the effect of a weapon against civilians—*all* weapons are deadly to defenseless civilians—would tell you anything one way or the other about how a weapon would work against an army in a war? The writers say my article was "wrong" because "mustard gas has killed thousands," but the article discussed the deaths caused by this gas during World War I. The writers assert, "Sarin disables soldiers by forcing them to don cumbrous chemical suits." The article acknowledged that wearing a protective suit is unpleasant, though I doubt the American soldiers who donned such protection during the 1991 Gulf war considered themselves "disabled."

Most importantly, my article did not in any way dismiss the dangers of chemical and biological arms—I did, after all, describe this class of weapons as "horrible." My point was that in actual use chemical and biological arms have been no more deadly than conventional bombs and explosives, which are also horrible. We should focus our worries on atomic weapons, which in actual use have proved themselves thousands of times more potent than conventional explosives, chemicals, germs, or anything else.

Glass houses

TO THE EDITORS:
I want to thank you for your recent editorial, "Speechless," as it represents a thoughtful critique of what I view in larger terms as the typical Democratic rhetoric of late (October 7). This rhetoric is organized around throwing stones while ducking accountability. I typically vote on the Republican side, but I truly value competition—I believe it raises the skill level of everyone involved—and this has been lacking with the current slew of Democratic leaders. I applaud your standing up for the principle of accountability, as this ultimately forces one to be guided by principles versus polls.

PAUL CALLAGHAN
Traverse City, Michigan ■

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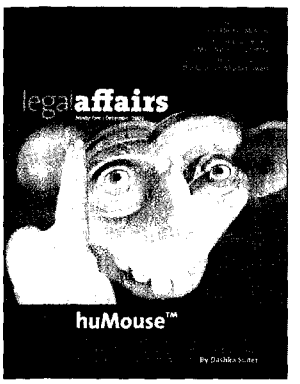

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Civil War

THINGS ARE ABOUT to get ugly in the Democratic Party—and it's about time. Critics say the Democrats went into the 2002 election divided. But, in fact, almost to a person, the party's national leaders converged around the same strategy. Dick Gephardt, Tom Daschle, Joe Lieberman, John Edwards, John Kerry, and Terry McAuliffe all, to varying degrees, endorsed the proposition that the party should acquiesce on the two great issues of the day: war with Iraq and the Bush tax cut. The Democrats ostensibly supported the latter and opposed the former, but they mainly tried to ensure that they weren't held responsible for either. And that effort produced almost comic levels of incoherence. Kerry and Daschle criticized the war endlessly, then voted for it on the flimsiest of pretexts, then went back to criticizing it. (I myself thought that this strategy, while a moral abdication, might work in the political short term. Boy, was I wrong.) Gephardt and McAuliffe attacked the tax cut but refused to call for its repeal. Instead, they called for an "economic summit" to discuss the deepening recession, without proposing which policies they hoped such a summit would adopt. Republicans say Democrats lost on November 5 because the voters disliked their proposals on the big questions of the day. But that can't be true, because the Democrats *didn't have* proposals on the big questions of the day. They decided that, in bad times, the shrewd thing to do was to get out of the way so voters could punish the president and his party for leading the country in the wrong direction. Instead, voters decided that, in difficult times, they preferred a president and a party that at least proposed a national direction to one that pretended that the great challenge facing the United States in November 2002 was prescription drugs.

Virtually every prominent Democratic leader leaves this campaign politically diminished. Gephardt's presidential run looks like a fortuitously timed escape hatch for a man so associated with electoral failure that he might not have won reelection as minority leader had he tried. In retrospect, Daschle's last several months as Senate majority leader look disastrous—he gave the Democrats no accomplishments to run on and got suckered into a fight over union protections in the homeland security bill, which may have cost Max Cleland his Senate seat in Georgia. Lieberman actually masterminded that disastrous homeland security fight in which, astonishingly, President Bush stole a Democratic idea and turned it into a political club against its original creators. Edwards's inability to carry Erskine Bowles to victory in North Carolina raises questions about his political standing in his home state, and, like Gephardt, his run for president looks like a convenient alternative to trying to hold on to his current job.

For his part, Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe's obsession with building a new, super-high-tech party headquarters and his relative indifference to his party's utter lack of vision on the war on terrorism perfectly embodied the party's fascination with political technique at the expense of political ideas. In the weeks leading up to Election Day, top Democrats boasted that they had mastered the science of turnout, as if getting people to vote was a logistical challenge that depended little on what people were being asked to vote for. These were the leaders of the Democratic Party. They fought this election from the meek and cynical center, and that center has not held.

The result is that the left, for the first time since the 1980s, has a shot at taking over the party. The defeat of moderate Democrats in swing states and districts inevitably tilts the congressional party toward ideological hard-liners in safe seats. Ted Kennedy and John Conyers would have yanked the party left in 1994 had not the Clinton White House moved in the other direction. But now there is no counterweight. And that is what makes the Democratic Party's current predicament so dangerous. The ideological vacuum atop the post–September 11 Democratic Party will inevitably be filled. And, if it is filled by Nancy Pelosi and Dennis Kucinich, the United States will no longer be a 50-50 nation; it will be a 40-60 nation for a generation.

Politically, the notion that the Democrats would have prospered this election had they run as the peace party is laughable. Tell that to Cleland—sunk because his Republican opponent painted the Democratic Party as hostile to defense. Or to Walter Mondale, who *did* trumpet his opposition to the war and was soundly defeated in a comparatively dovish state. The American public simply does not share the left's belief that the world is a dangerous place primarily because of the recklessness of American power. Americans may not know, or even necessarily agree with, all the details of President Bush's proposed war with Iraq. As with Ronald Reagan in the '80s, however, they are naturally drawn to a president who describes the enemy in clear, moralistic terms and confronts it without apology or ambivalence.

But, in a sense, responding to the newly emboldened doves with exit-poll data misses the point. It simply plays into the left's assumption that it operates from moral principle and everyone else in the party operates from focus groups. The tragedy of Gephardt, Daschle, and McAuliffe's behavior is that they have made Democratic support for war with Iraq synonymous with cynical calculation and ideological me-tooism. In fact, as this magazine has tried to argue, there are explicitly moral and undeniably liberal grounds for supporting an aggressive war on terrorism and regime change in Iraq. These principles have roots in the Democratic Party that long predate Paul Wolfowitz's latest speech at the American Enterprise Institute. If taken seriously by a party that stops treating prescription drugs as more central to its identity than national security, they will produce an agenda that challenges the president's indifference to postwar reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as his refusal to fully fund homeland security and act aggressively to secure loose nuclear materials throughout the globe. That agenda will allow Democratic candidates to compete in the many foreign policy–dominated elections to come.

But before Democrats can confront President Bush, they must confront one another. The coming fight within the party will be much like the fight on crime, welfare, and defense in the '80s. It will be ugly and, perhaps, racially tinged. It may even lead some prominent Democrats to leave the party and join the Greens. But it is welcome, if only because we have seen where vacuous consensus leads.

Bush has demonstrated in this election what Reagan demonstrated two decades ago: If you are ideologically audacious, you can redefine the boundaries of what is politically possible. The last time the ground shifted beneath them, the Democrats responded with denial, then cosmetic change, then internecine warfare, then an ideological transformation that saved the party. Now that reckoning is slowly beginning once again. And that, at least, is reason for hope.

PETER BEINART

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Responsibility Era

IF THE DEMOCRATS had a theme in this year's midterm election, it was accountability. Corporations should be held accountable for their cooked books. The CIA and FBI should be held accountable for their intelligence failures. And, most importantly, President Bush and his fellow Republicans should be held accountable for the sorry state of the economy. "It is not enough to talk about accountability," Senator Tom Daschle said a few months before the election. "You have to act to ensure it." Daschle was right—which is why the party must now hold him and other top Democrats accountable for the party's disastrous performance in this week's midterm elections.

Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Terry McAuliffe should resign. If the midterm debacle proved anything, it is that the Democrats are utterly devoid of ideas. In this sense, McAuliffe has been the perfect embodiment of the party he chairs. Prior to assuming the top job at the DNC, McAuliffe's political resumé consisted almost entirely of fund-raising posts. Not surprisingly, he has stuck with what he knows best—voraciously vacuuming up dollars and wracking his brain for new ways the Democrats can raise soft money post-McCain-Feingold. Unfortunately, that means the other things a party chair must do have not gotten done. Most importantly, McAuliffe has been an abysmal party spokesperson. There could be no finer coda to the McAuliffe era than his election night performance on CNN when, with the returns already indicating a GOP landslide, he proclaimed, "I think it's going to be a very good night for Democrats." Only if the night leads to McAuliffe being out of a job.

But McAuliffe is only part of the problem. Senate Majority Leader Daschle and soon-to-be-former House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt have also failed. While McAuliffe fixated on money, Daschle and Gephardt worried largely about tactics. For this year's midterms, the two men focused all their attention on the mechanics of the campaign: They recruited candidates, they perfected get-out-the-vote efforts, and they basically treated each race as its own separate entity. What Daschle and Gephardt refused to do was nationalize the midterm elections: While President Bush traveled the country lending his office and agenda to practically every Republican candidate, Democrats across the nation ran on wildly divergent platforms. That didn't matter, Daschle and Gephardt seemed to think, so long as the Democratic Party could rely on superior tactics.

To an extent, this emphasis on tactics is understandable: As legislators, Daschle and Gephardt owe their leadership positions to their mastery of such things. But, with a Republican in the White House, Daschle and Gephardt are more than just legislative leaders; they are the leaders of their party. Gephardt, evidently, does not feel he is up to the job—at least not from the House well. He is expected to announce that he will not seek another term as House Democratic leader, possibly so he can clear his calendar for a 2004 presidential run in which he will presumably try to formulate the national message he has failed to formulate thus far.

That leaves Daschle, and, unfortunately, there is little in his career to suggest he is well-suited to the task. Consider his failure to stake out clear positions on the two most important elements of Bush's agenda: the tax cut and Iraq. On the former, Daschle repeatedly attacked the White House for mismanaging the economy. "They have one economic all-purpose antidote for everything, and that is tax cuts—tax cuts largely dedicated to those at the very top," he said. But, since he wouldn't call for the repeal of any part of those Bush-sponsored tax cuts, Daschle offered merely a complaint, not an alternative. On Iraq, Daschle was similarly muddled: First, he opposed the president's request for congressional approval to go to war in Iraq; then, when it came time to actually vote, he supported a resolution that did just that; once the resolution was passed, he went back to expressing his skepticism about Bush's Iraq policy.

To be sure, there are Democrats who are more than willing to offer a message as ideologically audacious as President Bush's. Unfortunately, they are Democrats like Ted Kennedy and Nancy Pelosi, who offer the country a message it will reject every time. The party needs centrist leaders willing to give the country not merely a Democratic alternative but an attractive one. Key to that alternative should be a repeal of those parts of the Bush tax cut that overwhelmingly benefit the wealthy, coupled with a one-time tax rebate to lower-income Americans in order to stimulate the economy. Such a proposal wouldn't pass in what will now be a Republican Congress, of course. But it would at least give the country what Democrats failed to give it this election: a clear alternative. Which is what opposition parties do—if they don't want to stay in opposition forever. ■

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NOTEBOOK

DRUG TEST: This week's election was just the latest in which Democrats were let down by their supposed silver-bullet issue: prescription drugs. For months, surveys had shown, as the Democratic polling firm Democracy Corps put it in June, that a drug benefit is "one of the biggest [voter] concerns, and the issue on which Democrats have the biggest advantage." But, as in 2000, Republicans appear to have neutralized that advantage. Take the failed Senate campaign of Maine Democrat Chellie Pingree. As a leader of the state legislature, Pingree made her name by writing a bill to lower drug prices in her state. When she launched a campaign organized around a new federal drug benefit—there is a special section of her website, independent of her "issues" page, devoted entirely to "Rx Drug Help"—Democrats seized on hers as a sleeper race to watch. But Pingree's opponent, incumbent Susan Collins, did what Republicans have been doing successfully for a few years now: She made a big show of her own support for a weaker drug measure and furiously blurred the difference between the two. Pingree couldn't explain the distinction in the heat of the campaign and lost to Collins by 16 points. Indeed, it's hard to think of a Democrat who rode the prescription-drug issue to victory. That's thanks in large part to the millions of dollars the drug industry spent on ads praising their Republican lapdogs as courageous fighters. But, in the waning weeks of the campaign, Democrats seemed to largely give up on trying to explain their differences on prescription drugs at all. A look through recent Senate campaign ads available at the *National Journal* website, for instance, turned up just one devoted to the issue. The candidate? Minnesota Republican Norm Coleman.

THE BUBBA CONUNDRUM: Speaking of strategies that didn't work, all year Democrats were talking about the rural swing districts they needed to carry in order to win back the House of Representatives. Fear of alienating Bubba voters was a clear factor in Dick Gephardt's timidity in discussing issues like tax cuts and gun control. And it was why House Democrats recruited some of their most conservative candidates ever. But Democrats appear to have done as badly in rural districts as ever. And the failure of candidate Joe Turnham helps illustrate why. Turnham, a former state party chairman running in Alabama's third congressional district, may have been his party's most conservative 2002 House candidate. He is a Methodist lay speaker who describes himself as a "pro-gun, pro-life, pro-God, pro-pledge Democrat." Turnham challenged his opponent, Republican state legislator Mike Rogers, to a skeet shoot and even promised to form a NASCAR caucus in Congress. Turnham ran for an open seat vacated by a Republican, but the district actually leans Democratic and was once considered one of the party's best chances at a pickup. But Turnham still wound up losing, largely because his opponent bashed him as—you guessed it—an out-of-touch liberal. In a June press release, Rogers said Turnham was "a dependable foot soldier for liberal candidates and causes." A TV ad featuring images of Al Gore and Nancy Pelosi declared, "Joe Turnham: He's sold out our Alabama values to the Washington liberals." Some conservative Democrats will surely conclude that these broadsides worked because the national party's reputation really is too liberal for rural Southern voters—and there's certainly some truth to that. But the bigger reason Turnham lost was his fatal shortage of money, which prevented him from refuting his opponent's charges. After all, it's not easy for an obscure, Bible-thumping, conservative Democrat to hit up traditional party donors who are motivated largely by their liberal stances on issues such as abortion and gay rights. Democrats can recruit all the skeet-shootin', NASCAR-lovin' Democrats they want. But, until they find a way to fund them, they're still likely to lose.

PUNDIT REVISIONISM WATCH I: "The issue [of war with Iraq] disappeared from the front pages the minute the ink was dry on the congressional resolution. ... Now Bush seems about to make another major mistake in leaving the White House situation room to campaign coast to coast for his favored candidates."—Dick Morris, "ANYBODY SENSE A TREND?" *The Hill*, October 23

"Why is Bush in free fall? ... By campaigning for Republican candidates around the nation, Bush seems to be undermining the case for a military emergency requiring immediate action against Iraq. ... For their part, the Democrats have triangulated the war with Iraq, giving the president the resolution he wanted and thereby dismissing it as a campaign issue."—Morris, "BUSH'S FALL," *The New York Post*, October 29

"George W. Bush laid it on the line as he campaigned frenetically for Republican candidates, visiting ten states in the last three days of the campaign. Acting as if he were on the ballot himself, Bush barnstormed the nation asking for support as he faced the global showdown with terrorists in the Middle East. Still at war, shaken by 9/11, apprehensive about Iraq's and North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons, Americans turned to their president and gave him the thumping affirmation he did not get in the 2000 election."—Morris, "AMERICANS RALLY TO BUSH," *National Review Online*, November 6

MISSILE DEFENSE: Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi (*nomme de guerre*: Abu Ali) and five lesser Al Qaeda militants will soon be joining Mohammed Atta in "paradise." While traveling by car in northwest Yemen last week, al-Harethi and comrades were killed by a Hellfire missile shot from a Predator drone operated by the CIA, the first such killing in the country. Apparently, al-Harethi was Osama bin Laden's top capo in Yemen, and the United States was not sad to see him go (in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, "It would be a very good thing if he were out of business"). But

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isn't there an irony here? When Israel assassinates the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the State Department raps it on the knuckles. When the United States does the same, no one even raises an eyebrow. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher tried to explain away the contradiction by claiming that, in Israel, targeted assassinations might disrupt political negotiations with the Palestinians. Except there are no political negotiations taking place, and, even if there were, they would hardly be strengthened by Israel sparing terrorists who systematically blow up its civilians. By all means, the United States should use Predators against al-Harethi and others who would threaten our security. But in so doing, we leave little doubt as to what safeguarding that security entails—which makes it all the stranger that we would deny such methods to the government of Israel.

PUNDIT REVISIONISM WATCH II: "[The parties] are so evenly matched at the moment that all the incentives are to be careful. ... We have tactical elections, we don't have big elections, because there's every prospect that you can win by thinking small."—Democratic pollster Stanley B. Greenberg, quoted in *The Washington Post*, October 30

"Democrats can't win [Congress] race by race. You can't expect to run better campaigns, recruit better campaigns, spend more money. ... It's Democrats above all who need big ideas, who need to create an election that is about something. Otherwise, you can't overcome these other [Republican] advantages."—Greenberg, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, November 6

L'ETAT, C'EST MOI: "I know something about being a government. And you've got a good one."—George W. Bush, stumping for Governor Mike Huckabee in Arkansas, November 4

FLOOR VOTES WOULD'VE BEEN TRICKY, TOO: "The biggest obstacle was that he couldn't campaign. Other people had to do it for him."—Tish Traficant, describing the hurdles faced by her husband, expelled Ohio Representative Jim Traficant, currently serving an eight-year prison sentence on bribery and racketeering convictions. Running from behind bars as an independent, Traficant received more than 27,000 votes—15 percent of those cast—for his old congressional seat.

AND NOW FOR THE GOOD NEWS: "Gary Hart, the former Colorado senator whose presidential campaign imploded in a sex scandal 15 years ago, is seriously considering a new bid for the White House."—*The Denver Post*, November 5 ■

[illegible] | Bruce Reed

BLAME GAME

Good news for Bush: Won't have to spend the next two years blaming Democrats for blocking his agenda. Bad news: That was his agenda.

LOST IN SPACE

Democratic soul-searching begins. Dem spin: "This wasn't a referendum on our vision. We don't have one!"

YOUNG AT HEART

Septuagenarians Lautenberg and Mondale bat .500 as Democratic pinch hitters. Party's new motto: "We don't just promise prescription drugs—we use them!"

BLOOD FEUD

Oklahoma becomes 48th state to ban cockfighting. Tell fans not to worry: The 2004 campaign has already started!

BUSH DYNASTY

Administration largesse keeps Jeb alive as heir to Bush throne. White House learns lesson from 2000: Why steal Florida when the taxpayers can buy it for you?

PITT STOP

Harvey Pitt resigns after ordering SEC investigation of his own ethical lapses. White House response: "That's not what we meant by self-policing."

TAKING RYAN PRIVATE

Pentagon considers plan to privatize one-sixth of the Army. New slogan: "We're looking for a few good companies."

FREE RYDER

Consumer spending plunges as crime rate goes up. There's a little Winona Ryder in all of us!

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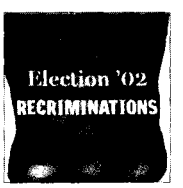
Can the Democrats speak?

Incommunicado

By JONATHAN CHAIT

TO BE AWASH in recriminations seems to be the natural condition of the Democratic Party. The party has engaged in blame-assigning throughout the 1980s, much of the 1990s (remember health care, the 1994 elections, and impeachment?), the 2000 elections (not only after but during), and continuing without interruption though the George W. Bush presidency. The ritual is, in a way, deeply reassuring: It affirms for party loyalists that their misfortunes are contingent upon misjudgments that they can correct. It's indeed true that there have been occasions when the Democrats' misfortunes have resulted from their own mistakes. But the debacle that took place in this week's elections is not one of those occasions. The Democrats did not lose the Senate because of any tactical or strategic miscalculation. There's nothing they could have done that would have resulted in any appreciably better outcome. The harsh fact is that, for the foreseeable future, the Democrats will face an uphill struggle no matter what they do.



One recrimination that began to circulate even before the election took place was, as former Al Gore spokesman Chris Lehane put it, "The way to nationalize an election and make it a referendum on the Bush economy was to talk about the billion-pound elephant in the room—the Bush tax boon for the wealthy." Now, no one would be more eager than I to believe that the Democrats' political salvation lies in attacking the Bush tax cut. Unfortunately, there's little evidence that this is true. After the economy soured last year, Democrats correctly understood that they had to come out for some kind of tax cut. The position most took, which seemed to make both economic and political sense, was in favor of a short-term, egalitarian tax cut to bolster consumer spending but against a long-term, upper-bracket tax cut such as that being pushed by Bush. But, no matter how hard the Democrats tried to communicate this difference to the public, the only messages that came through were either for the tax cut or against it. And so most took the sensible stance of voting against the tax cut but declining to trumpet their opposition. Those who proposed canceling the as-yet-unimplemented upper-bracket tax cuts found their position rendered as raising taxes on the middle class.

A second, related critique is that the Democrats failed to articulate an alternative economic program. But that simply isn't true. It was Democrats who originated the idea of a tax rebate in 2001. Democrats also favored a second rebate and a temporary tax credit to encourage business investment. Last winter, the Democrats tried to use their economic stimulus plan in a straight-up fight with Bush over reviving the economy. Instead, the debate ended up being solely about Bush's proposal, which consisted of long-term business tax cuts that offered virtually no immediate economic relief. Bush and congressional Republicans lambasted Democrats for failing to support their plan, and, after Democrats saw their public approval ratings drop precipitously, they submitted ignominiously.

The common element in these fiascos is the Democrats' catastrophic inability to communicate their message. This sort of explanation has, in the past, been used to make defeat seem contingent and easily reversible; after presidential defeats by Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis in the '80s, liberals maintained that the party didn't need to change its message so much as it needed to find a more telegenic messenger. Alas, in this instance, the Democrats' communication problem is structural and self-reinforcing.

The fact of the matter is the Republican Party enjoys certain basic advantages when it comes to getting its message across. One is that it has substantially more money for TV advertising. (Republicans touted this advantage while talking up their prospects prior to the election. Now that they've won, they ignore the impact of money completely.) The GOP also enjoys allied media outlets like Fox News and talk radio, which disseminate its message to its base in a way that Democrats can't duplicate.

Both of these phenomena are relatively recent. Ten years ago, pro-GOP mass media lacked its current breadth. And, before 1994, Democratic control of Congress assured some semblance of financial parity—business interests wanted to curry favor with the party that wrote the laws as well as with the party they felt represented their political viewpoint. Since Republicans took Congress, however, they began to gain a decisive advantage in fund-raising, and that disparity has only grown since Bush took office. (In the last cycle, Republicans out-raised Democrats by some $200 million, not including tens of millions spent by affiliated business interests such as the drug industry.) During the Clinton presidency, Democrats were able to offset the GOP's financial and media advantages because they had the bully pulpit of the presidency. Now that Republicans also hold the White House, they enjoy almost unfettered capacity to set the political agenda.

This is why Democrats have failed time and again to find a popular issue to use against Bush. Repeatedly, the Democrats have attempted to seize upon instances where Bush sided with the interests of his economic base rather than with the preferences of the general public. Such cases are legion. Polls showed that the public wanted a moderate tax cut geared to the middle class, rather than a huge one geared to the wealthy. Polls also showed opposition to Social Security privatization, support for a broad-based prescription-drug benefit within Medicare, and backing for a tough crackdown on corporate fraud.

None of these issues, however, wound up being effective for Democrats. In every instance, Republicans presented

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their position as if it comported with the popular preference and presented this message not only through their own ads but also through those of allied business interests. In tight races this fall, the most visible TV presence typically has been advertisements by groups like the United Seniors Association, thanking Republicans for supporting a Medicare prescription-drug benefit. The United Seniors Association is funded by the drug industry in part to prevent a Medicare prescription-drug benefit. But there can't be one voter in a hundred who's aware of this.

The mainstream media isn't much help in sorting through this, as debates between competing policy proposals—whether tax cuts or prescription-drug plans—are are almost invariably rendered in the press as arcane, niggling disputes in which neither side is more right than the other. Democrats say the Bush tax cut favors the wealthy, but Republicans say it favors the working poor. Democrats say Republicans want to privatize Social Security, but Republicans say they don't. Democrats say they want a prescription-drug benefit within Medicare, but Republicans say they want the same thing and blame Democrats for stopping it. Democrats say Bush is doing the bidding of the accounting lobby and undermining the Securities and Exchange Commission, but—Look! There's a CEO in handcuffs on the evening news!

When the same thing happens to the Democrats over and over again, you have to conclude that it's not just an interminable series of tactical mistakes—if only Tom Daschle had said this or done that—but the result of an actual structural disadvantage. This isn't to say Democrats will continue to lose forever. Eventually, something—a deep recession, a disastrous Republican overreach—will come along to rescue them. And a better strategy can help around the margins. But, for the foreseeable future, Democrats will continue to lose, and the notion that smarter tactics or better leaders or even a sweeping strategic reconceptualization can rescue them from their predicament is little more than a comforting delusion. ■

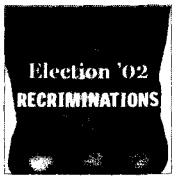
Why there's nothing the Democrats could have done.

No Fault

By John B. Judis

Democrats are gradually coalescing around an interpretation of why their party did so poorly. The party, the argument goes, failed to get out its base; and the reason it failed to do so was because it didn't draw a clear enough distinction between its policies and the Republicans'. As former political consultant Paul Begala argued on CNN, "The Democrats didn't fight Bush hard enough on the tax cut, and they didn't campaign on it. They didn't fight him hard enough on the war. That means that base Democrats are very depressed on this Election Day." The party's rank and file, said California Representative Nancy Pelosi, faulted party leadership for its timidity in presenting an alternative to the GOP.

This seems like a plausible explanation for the Democrats' defeats—until you actually look at what happened on the ground. In most of the crucial Senate races that the Democrats lost, the Democratic candidate did proportionately as well as ever among the Democratic base. Turnout did go down from 2000, but it wasn't unusually low compared to the last off-year election in 1998. In Missouri, for instance, losing Democratic Senate candidate Jean Carnahan garnered the same percentage of the vote in St. Louis and Kansas City that her late husband had gotten in 2000 when he defeated incumbent Republican John Ashcroft. What made the difference in her race—and in others around the country—was that the GOP did so much better at turning out voters in Republican-leaning areas and in the mostly white suburbs where Independents and swing voters predominate. The Democrats didn't lose the election in the cities but in the suburbs.



Would the Democrats have done better in the suburbs had they been less timid about defining their differences with the GOP? Probably not. If you look closely at the political context in which these races occurred—in particular, the overwhelming popularity of George W. Bush as a war president and the overriding importance of national security as a campaign issue—it is far from apparent that more strident attacks from the Democrats would have reversed any of the outcomes. Indeed, while such an approach might have improved Democrats' standing among their base, it would likely have eroded their position among swing voters still further.

Take Georgia, where Republican Saxby Chambliss defeated Democratic incumbent Max Cleland. Cleland won Atlanta's highly Democratic Fulton County by 58 percent to 40 percent, while successful Senate candidate Zell Miller won it by a somewhat better 66 percent to 31 percent in 2000 when he ran against Republican Matt Mattingly. But the real turnaround came in white, upscale Cobb County, north of Atlanta. Chambliss defeated Cleland there by 59 percent to 39 percent, whereas Miller had defeated Mattingly by 52 percent to 44 percent. That's a swing of 28 points. Similarly, in white suburban Gwinett County, northeast of Atlanta, Chambliss bested Cleland by a whopping 64 percent to 34 percent; in 2000, by contrast, Miller edged out Mattingly by 50 percent to 46 percent. These suburban counties are where Cleland lost the race. Likewise, in Missouri, Carnahan won her urban base but did significantly worse than her late husband in places like predominately white suburban St. Louis County and Osage County, outside of Jefferson.

Commentators on Tuesday night made much of New Hampshire Democrat Jeanne Shaheen's failure to carry the city of Manchester against Republican John Sununu. But

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Manchester has long ceased to be a Democratic stronghold. Even as she coasted to reelection in her 2000 governor's race, Shaheen barely defeated far-right Republican Gordon Humphrey in Manchester, 48 percent to 47 percent. Where Shaheen really lost votes to Sununu was in suburban towns, where Sununu did even better than Bush had done in 2000. In that election, Bush carried Merrimack by 50 percent to 45 percent, while Shaheen's gubernatorial challenger, Gordon Humphrey, beat her 48 percent to 47 percent. This week, Sununu carried Merrimack by 55 percent to 43 percent over Shaheen. She, like Carnahan, Cleland, and Mondale, lost the election in the suburbs.

In Minnesota, where Walter Mondale was defeated by Republican Norm Coleman, Mondale—following on the heels of the late Paul Wellstone—got out the Democratic vote. Turnout was up in Minnesota, but Mondale still didn't do as well in key suburban areas as victorious Democratic candidate Mark Dayton had done in 2000 against Republican Rod Grams. Dayton had won Hennepin County, which includes Democratic Minneapolis, but which also includes suburban areas that have swung between Democrats and Republicans, by 53 percent to 37 percent in 2000; yet Mondale only won it by 51 percent to 46 percent this year. And Coleman easily defeated Mondale in rural counties where Dayton had been competitive. Coleman won Cass County in central Minnesota by 54 percent to 40 percent, while Grams had won it by only 47 percent to 46 percent.

WHAT EXPLAINS THE Republicans' success in the suburbs? Primarily, Bush's popularity as the leader of the war against terrorism, which carried over to the Republican Party and to Republican candidates. Prior to September 11, 2001, Bush's job-approval ratings hovered at 51 percent in the Gallup poll, and more people viewed the Republican Party unfavorably than favorably. After September 11, however, Bush's popularity soared and has never fallen back to its pre-September 11 levels. On the eve of this year's election, Gallup found that 63 percent of Americans approved of the president's handling of his job and only 29 percent disapproved, while 53 percent viewed the Republicans favorably and only 35 percent viewed them unfavorably. And, while Bush's popularity has fallen among self-identified Democrats, it remains high among Independents. In a CBS/*New York Times* poll conducted at the end of October, Independents approved of Bush's job as president by 60 percent to 27 percent and of his job on foreign policy by 54 percent to 33 percent; they also viewed Republicans favorably by 54 percent to 35 percent.

Bush's popularity as a war leader translated into voter support for Republican candidates in general. According to the CBS/*New York Times* poll, 31 percent of voters, including 28 percent of Independents and 15 percent of Democrats, thought of their vote for Congress as "a vote for George Bush." Bush crystallized that support during his five-day campaign on behalf of Republican candidates in the key battleground states.

Republican candidates capitalized on their party's reputation among Independents, as well as among their own followers, by painting their Democratic opponents as weak on defense. Republican Senate candidates in Georgia, South Carolina, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Missouri, Colorado, and Texas, to name a few, challenged their Democratic opponents' support for the war against terror. In Georgia, Chambliss attacked Cleland for opposing Bush's version of the homeland security bill and for questioning the need for a national missile defense. Likewise, in New Hampshire, Sununu attacked Shaheen for accepting contributions from the Council for a Livable World—which has been critical of the administration's missile defense plans—and for opposing the administration's homeland security bill.

Democrats hoped that by quickly passing the president's resolution on Iraq they could put national security issues behind them and focus the electorate on Social Security and prescription drugs. Many political analysts, including myself, thought this ploy would work and preserve the Democrats' Senate majority. It didn't. Not only did voters accord more importance to fighting the war against terrorism than to reducing prescription-drug prices, but their view of the war on terrorism—and of Bush's leadership in fighting it—colored their perception of the nation's economic problems. Most Americans did not blame Bush and the Republicans for the economic downturn that began last year. Asked last month by pollsters Fabrizio, McLaughlin and Associates who was "most responsible for the economy," 23 percent of Americans blamed the business cycle, 21 percent the September 11 attacks, 15 percent former President Clinton, and 14 percent Bush. Given the nation's economic doldrums, it is remarkable that the preelection Ipsos-Reid survey found 54 percent of Americans approving of Bush's handling of the economy. Meanwhile, the CBS/*New York Times* survey found that the public, by 41 percent to 37 percent, believed that Republicans were "more likely to make sure the country is prosperous."

Democrats did do well in governors' races, where they took over Republican statehouses in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Arizona, Tennessee, and Kansas. But these exceptions prove the rule. Gubernatorial candidates were least likely to be judged on national security issues. In these races, the Democrats' advantage on economic and social issues came to the fore. Bush's popularity as a war president—except, perhaps, in Florida and Texas—was not an important factor. Suburban voters were more likely to care what a Democrat thought about social spending or abortion or gun control. But, in judging House and Senate candidates in the same states, swing voters and Independents paid more attention to national security than to Social Security.

So what if Democrats had followed Begala and Pelosi's advice and come out strong against the tax cut and war with Iraq? It's hard to imagine the outcome would have been any different. If Shaheen had come out against the president's tax cut in taxophobic New Hampshire, she would have likely suffered the same fate as Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mark Fernald, who, because he advocated an income

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tax, was routed by 21 points. Cleland's campaign would have been a lot more coherent if he had opposed Bush's tax cut, but he would have lost even more votes in Cobb County. And opposition to the war would have doomed Democratic Senate candidates in the South—and probably in South Dakota and Colorado as well. In Minnesota, Mondale did draw the lines very clearly on taxes and the war in his November 4 debate with Coleman—and he subsequently lost the election.

The country might have been better off had Democrats tried to develop a coherent foreign policy and advocated the repeal of Bush's disastrous tax cut. Even as a party, the Democrats might be better off now if they had articulated clearer positions in opposition to the Bush administration. But, if they had, they would have still lost the Senate—possibly by an even larger margin than they did. Although it wasn't apparent until the final days of the election, the Republicans were borne to victory this fall by Bush's energetic response to Osama bin Laden. And there was probably nothing that the Democrats could have done to stop them. ■

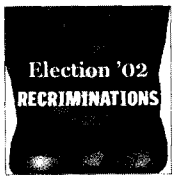
How the GOP learned voter turnout.

Head Count

By Ryan Lizza

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

It's 5:30 P.M. on Election Day, and I am crammed into a minivan with John Thune's family. Thune's brother-in-law, Greg Senkbile, is driving. In the backseat are Thune's brother Rich; his sister, Karen; and his cousin, Kari. I'm riding shotgun. The polls close in an hour and a half, and the Thune family, bundled up in winter gear, has been ordered onto the streets of Sioux Falls to flush out any Republicans who haven't yet shown up to vote. We are racing down 57th Street, trying to catch up with an SUV driven by Thune's brother Tim.



Ostensibly a reporter covering what the Republican National Committee (RNC) told me was the largest and most sophisticated state get-out-the-vote (GOTV) effort in the party's history, I have suddenly been pressed into service as a Thune flusher. Moments ago, Tim pulled up beside our minivan with instructions. "Ryan, can you read a map?" he asked, passing a photocopy of precinct numbers 2-9 through my window. "Take this." We are now supposed to follow him to our door-knocking assignment, and Greg is relying on me to keep track of Tim's Mitsubishi Montero. "Do you see him?" he asks. But John Thune's brother has disappeared into a knot of after-work traffic. We are lost. As I check our map, Greg says he has no idea where we are. "I'm from Nebraska."

Aside from being John Thune's family, Greg and the rest of this flushing team are the bottom rungs of a grand Republican plan—an operation the party has spent two years building—to match Democrats on Election Day in turning out their most loyal voters. After decisively losing the turnout battle in 2000, the GOP has spent the last election cycle studying what went wrong and how to fix it. In state after state in 2000, media polls had shown George W. Bush with a much larger share of the electorate than he actually received. In New Hampshire, polls suggested a 10-point lead, yet Bush won by only a single point. In Washington, he was up by 1 point but lost by 5 points, and, in Delaware, he was leading by 4 points on election eve but lost by a whopping 13. On the left, union members and African Americans overperformed, turning out in higher percentages than their share of the population; on the right, social conservatives underperformed.

So Karl Rove and the White House political shop ordered the party to revitalize its grassroots operations. Their solution: the "72-hour task force," a program the party used in more than 30 states this year to boost turnout in the final days. Bush may have been the catalyst for Republican success Tuesday, but these new task forces were the vehicles that translated his popularity into Election Day victories. This time, it was Republicans across the country who exceeded expectations and outperformed at the polls. In race after race, the Republican margin of victory was larger than what the final polls predicted. In Colorado, the last public poll showed Wayne Allard at 44 percent, yet he won with 51 percent of the vote. In Georgia, where Republicans had one of their best GOTV operations, Saxby Chambliss was at 44 percent in the last two polls but received 53 percent. There were similar surges in the Senate races in North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Texas.

The woman who oversaw this effort is Blaise Hazelwood, the relatively unknown political director of the RNC. She has become the party's evangelist for returning to grassroots organizing, which emphasizes person-to-person contact rather than lavish spending on increasingly ineffective TV ads. Talking in a conference room at Republican headquarters in Washington, she spoke about the effort in revolutionary terms, saying that Rove asked her to do nothing less than "change the culture of the party." Asked where one should go on Election Day to see the best 72-hour task force this year, she told me without hesitation, "South Dakota."

Larry Russell and Phillip Stutts, the boyish co-directors of the task force in Sioux Falls, are an unlikely duo to be running the ground game of the most important Senate race in the country. Larry is 30 years old and a longtime Thune aide. Phil is 28, and the most experience he has had doing GOTV was a stint as a volunteer for the Bush campaign in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in 2000.

Going into Election Day, the conventional wisdom here is that incumbent Democrat Tim Johnson has the superior ground operation: The Johnson campaign has Steve Hildebrand, Al Gore's Iowa coordinator and one of the best

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

Tough Choices

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

When the candidates elected this Tuesday wake up on Wednesday morning, they'll face a set of challenges that will demand all of their strength and wisdom. Internationally, they will have to guide the U.S. through a period as dangerous as any we have known. At the same time, they must make sure that agendas essential to the health of our democracy are not pushed to one side as we attempt to deal with the world crisis.

And all of this will have to be accomplished despite enormous deficits facing federal, state, and local governments and an economy seemingly in disarray.

But there is no question that both our foreign and domestic agendas can and must go forward. Maintaining the momentum in both areas will require making some difficult choices, so it's essential that we have legislators who are tough and smart—and committed to a broad vision of what our country needs. That's where the voters come in.

While most voters are probably familiar with their candidates' positions on national defense, what about the big domestic issues?

For example, where do Congressional candidates stand on education? Last year, Congress, with broad bipartisan support—including the President's—passed an ambitious K-12 education bill. This bill, popularly known as "No Child Left Behind," sets new standards for our schools and stringent new requirements for school performance, and it offers extra support for schools and students who need it. Many people believe this legislation will be a turning point for our schools, but we have to make sure there is funding—for example, to provide additional reading teachers and extra help for children who need it. However, Congress has yet to appropriate any funding for education this year, and it seems clear that whatever is appropriated will not adequately fund "No Child Left Behind." Will this much-heralded bill become yet another underfunded mandate? Ask your candidates how they will vote if elected.

A Chronic Problem

And what are the candidates' positions on healthcare issues? The public has already spoken in favor of a Patients' Bill of Rights, and yet we still do not have the legislation that would allow sick people who have been denied treatment by their HMO to challenge these decisions.

What kind of remedies do the candidates favor for spiraling drug costs? Voters across the board have called for a prescription drug plan under Medicare. Some of the plans being considered put drugs within the reach of retirees of modest means. Others do not. What exactly do your candidates support?

Make sure you know where candidates and elected officials stand on the issues.

And what are their longterm views on access to decent and affordable healthcare for all Americans? More than 41 million people in the U.S. are currently without health insurance—up 1.4 million from last year. And roughly 80 percent of them are in working families. But even people who do have health insurance are paying more and getting less every year.

No one pretends that there are easy answers to these problems, but we will never solve them unless we make sure that the legislators we elect have intelligent and well thought-out views on these and other tough national issues.

It's Not Either...Or

Can we afford to give this kind of attention to domestic problems? Many people say that we simply don't have the money to pay for the war on terrorism and pursue our peacetime agendas. When people tell me this, my blood boils. I remind them of the public money we are spending on an enormous tax cut for 1 percent of Americans: Over a 10-year period, it will amount to almost half a trillion dollars. And I point out the extremely generous tax breaks that many of our big companies enjoy. For example, WorldCom and Enron, together, got more than $6 billion in tax breaks over the past five years. If we revisited the policies that lead to this kind of corporate welfare, we could pay for extra help for students who need it and prescription drugs for seniors without sacrificing essential spending for defense. In fact, our domestic economy and our national security are interdependent.

The people who lead us will have to make these and other tough choices, so it's essential that candidates for public office tell the public exactly where they stand—on how to defend our nation from foreign attack *and* on domestic issues that can't and shouldn't be put on hold. If you aren't certain about your candidates' views, you still have time to find out—and be sure to pay attention to how your representatives vote *after* the election. ■

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operatives in the Democratic Party. My hotel is swarming with Johnson's people, and the consensus among them is that Thune has no ground game at all. They laugh at the fact that President Bush's visit Sunday night tied up campaign workers who should have been out knocking on doors. They scoff at the idea that slick Republican operatives would bother getting their hands dirty with GOTV efforts. The local press agrees. Sioux Falls's main paper, *The Argus Leader*, ran a story on Election Day that said Thune's voter data isn't as sophisticated as Johnson's. Even as far back as July, political handicapper Charlie Cook argued, "Timothy P. Johnson appears to have the better campaign (some say the best Senate campaign ever put together) and a crisper, sharper message."

The quote is blown up and posted on the wall in Larry and Phil's offices. They don't just think Cook is wrong; they *know* he is. "If we execute this plan, we can't lose this election," says Larry. "There is absolutely no way they can do more than we've done. It's unprecedented in South Dakota history and probably nationally as well." Phil adds, "We've crossed every t and dotted every i. We've left nothing to chance." At campaign headquarters, the first thing Larry and Phil show me is a giant board covering one wall of the office. On the left side is a list of all 73 precincts in Minnehaha County, home to almost 20 percent of the state's voters. On the right is the numerical vote goal—52 percent plus 1—for each one of those precincts. In the middle are the names of 800 volunteers responsible for reaching those targets. This vast army of volunteers is the core of the system. Statewide, Republicans have an astonishing 6,000 activists working out of 13 offices. They were all recruited before October 1, and each of them had two to three days of training on how to get voters to the polls. Each recruit doesn't have to bring in all that many: There are 228,200 registered Republicans in the state. If turnout is about 70 percent—typical for a midterm election in South Dakota—Thune has one volunteer for every 30 GOP voters in South Dakota. (That's significantly better than the RNC's recommended goal of one volunteer for 40 to 100 voters.) "This is the future of the Republican Party," says Larry.

In addition to Election Day manpower, the South Dakota GOP is running an aggressive absentee-ballot program. The campaign sends out literature the same day that any absentee ballot is requested so the two will arrive in the voter's mailbox together. Then the voter is hounded with phone calls until the campaign finds out how he plans to vote. If he remains undecided, the state is small enough that Thune himself will call the voter. In the final 72 hours, the campaign's volunteers make about 200,000 phone calls, which RNC research shows are more effective than recorded messages. By Monday evening, the campaign will also have sent a volunteer to every Republican home twice in the previous four days. This is supplemented by weeks of issue-based direct mail, targeted to voters based on interviews with door-knockers earlier in the year.

Over dinner Sunday night, just after the president's final rally here, Thune's spokesman, Christine Iverson, tells me that Larry has been walking into her office during these last days with spreadsheets, telling her, "It's statistically impossible for us to lose." Larry and Phil have built their 72-hour task force quietly. Until I showed up, they had never talked to the press about it. "We didn't want the Democrats to bring an extra five thousand union guys into the state," says Iverson on the Sunday before the election. "They don't know what's going to hit them."

BUT I DO: It's two teenage girls in braces. On Monday, I get a call from Larry. "We have a great group of home-schoolers," he says. They will be knocking on doors in precinct 2-9, one of the tonier areas of Sioux Falls, and I will be allowed to accompany them. We depart from headquarters by midday in search of the home-schoolers. On the way, we spot a woman walking to a door with some campaign literature. "That's a pro-life walker there," Larry points out with pride. But our home-schoolers are nowhere to be found, and we seem lost. "I have no idea where we are right now," Phil says.

But we circle back and soon run into two of the home-schoolers. Larry and Phil drop me off. Annmarie is 14 ("Fifteen in December") and Aubrey, also 14, is her best friend. They are actually not home-schooled but attend a 32-student, K-12 Christian school at the Cornerstone Church. Aubrey tells me about *Brio*, a teen magazine published by Focus on the Family, and Annmarie complains about having to drive around with her brother because he listens to "public music" instead of Christian music. The kids tell me they got involved when a local conservative activist, Dr. Allen Unruh, a chiropractor, Buchananite, and crusader for premarital abstinence, called Cornerstone asking for volunteers for the Thune campaign. The school's pastor let the kids take the day off from class to get out the vote for Thune. They are not even jeopardizing the $20 award that the school gives out each year for perfect classroom attendance "because Pastor said we are helping John Thune to have a good state," explains Aubrey.

Few people are home (it's the middle of the day on a Monday), and the ones who are assure us they are going to vote for Thune. It's a fairly conservative precinct, and the kids strike up conversations with the voters about the merits of other church-schools in the area. There are lots of anti-abortion bumper stickers and Thune yard signs. On one car is a sticker that says, ARE YOU FOLLOWING JESUS THIS CLOSE? We move swiftly from house to house until we approach one with Johnson signs and a scarecrow on the lawn. Our list says it is the home of a registered Republican, but the girls are worried. "He's mean!" says Annmarie. "Tim Johnson wants to kill babies," Aubrey says. "You mean with abortion?" Annmarie asks. "I'm glad my parents didn't have an abortion."

Later, the Johnson supporter from this house approaches us in his minivan. The two girls actually scream and step back as he nears. He has a beard and is smoking a pipe and does actually seem a little mean. He rolls down his window and shakes his finger at us, complaining about all the nega-

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tive advertising in the race. "You guys tell Thune about that! It's ridiculous!"

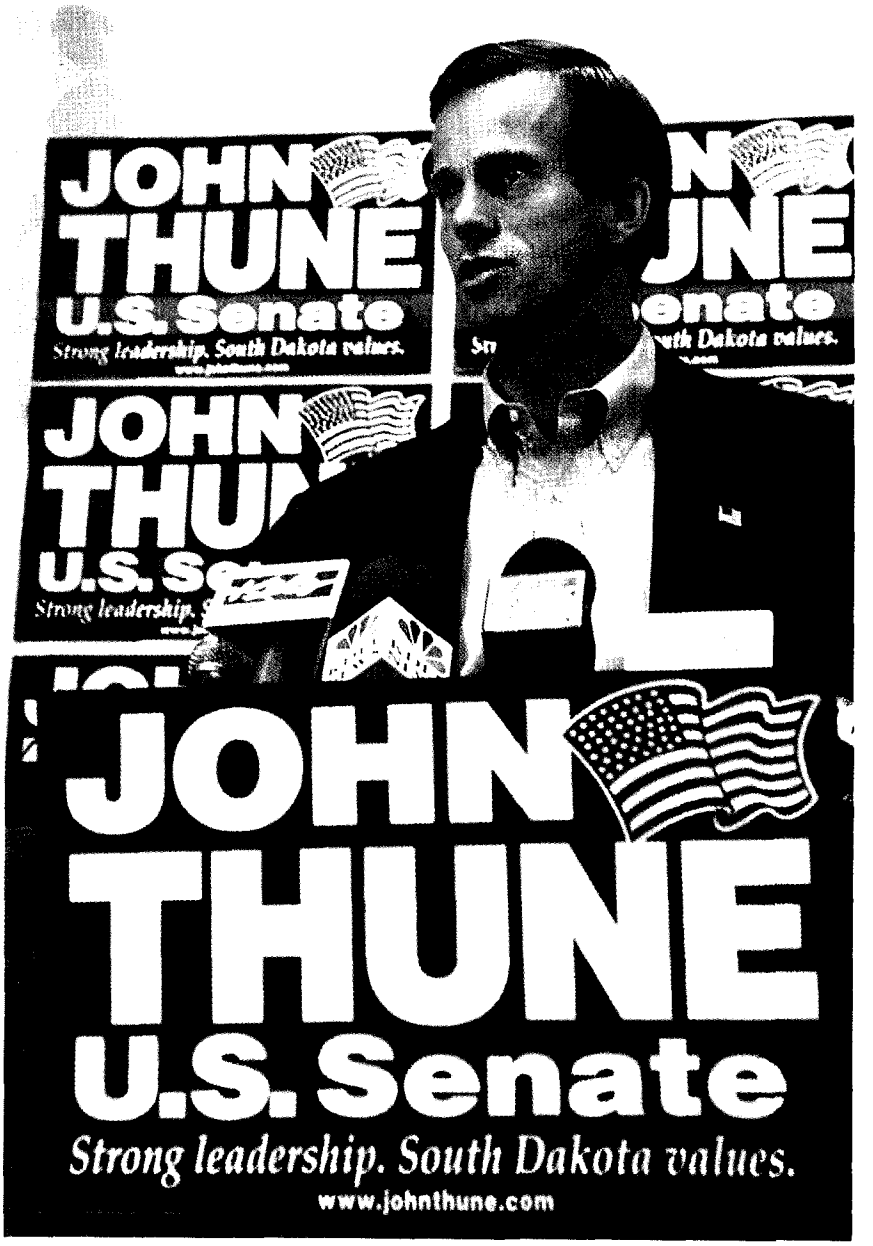
BACK AT HEADQUARTERS on Monday afternoon, Larry and Phil show off another part of their operation, one they hope sums up the grassroots spirit of the campaign. Thune's 82-year-old grandfather is sitting in a small room slowly dialing up voters throughout the state. They urge me to watch him call some South Dakotans. (I stand awkwardly behind him for a minute. I don't hear him say anything and quietly leave.) Sitting at a couple of other phone-bank terminals are two of Thune's brothers, also making calls. But the real preparations are in a conference room down the hall, where staffers are preparing packets of information for the precinct captains, poll watchers, and flushers to help them get voters to the polls the next day. After all the door-knocking, literature drops, phone calls, and TV ads, the mechanics of moving voters to voting booths will be the real test.

So, Tuesday afternoon, I return to precinct 2-9 to get inside the operation as it unfolds. The polling place is at the Calvary Assembly of God. The sign out front reads, A NATION THAT KILLS ITS OWN CHILDREN IS A NATION WITHOUT HOPE. A program from Sunday's service suggests how small and close-knit this community is. "Pray for Anne Grohs," it says. "She had back surgery recently." Just outside the church gym, where the voting booths are, a flyer is displayed advertising the entire 2002 South Dakota Republican ticket. (Technically, this is illegal since there isn't supposed to be any campaign literature this close to the voting booth.)

Inside I find two of Phil and Larry's 6,000 staffers. Ray Binstock is precinct 2-9's captain, and Lewis Casson is the poll watcher. They are a study in contrasts. Ray says he was recruited for the job by local party officials because he is pro-life. Lewis, his next-door neighbor, is here because Ray asked him to help out. Ray is a stiff party man. Lewis is humorously indiscreet and can't wait to get out of here. He jokes about taking me to see strippers in Sioux Falls. When a long line of voters shows up, he asks, "Jesus Christ, did the pubs let out?"

Ray and Lewis have the packets that were prepared for them last night. There's a map for the polling place and another one for the phone bank. A three-page sheet in Lewis's packet gives idiot-proof instructions on his duties. A personalized letter from his field representative thanks him for his service. At the bottom, she even scrawled a note: "I hope that you had a great time in Europe," a piece of information she gleaned from Larry and Phil's master database of volunteers ("in Europe until Nov. 1," it noted about Lewis).

Their job is simple. They have an alphabetical printout of every registered Republican in the precinct. As voters check in, they cross them off the list, which has carbon copies behind it. Every three hours, the poll watcher tears one of those copies off and ferries it to an assigned phone bank, where staffers call the remaining names and urge them to vote. I notice one of the weaknesses in their system right away. In a state like South Dakota, where many Republicans cross party lines, it is important to identify the people you know will vote for Johnson and remove them from the call lists. But several Republicans who yesterday told me and the Cornerstone Church kids that they would be voting for Johnson are still on Lewis's list of people to turn out. In fact, even the pipe-smoking baby-killer in the minivan is on the list.



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As the afternoon drags on it is clear this team isn't meeting the precinct's goals. Precinct 2-9 has 1,549 registered voters. Nine hundred thirteen of them, about 60 percent, are Republicans. At 3:10 p.m. we have only 401 Republicans out of the 768 people who have voted. "Percentage-wise, that's not so great," Ray tells me. At 4:00, I follow Lewis's silver Mercedes as he drives back to headquarters to drop off his list to the phone bank. Larry and Phil are here. Phil's neck looks like it has broken out in a rash. In his office, he is pacing nervously and screaming into the dangling earpiece of his cell phone. "I want you to get everyone into the precincts and flush people out." A few minutes later he says to me, "I've been up since 3:30."

The reason for his concern is before our eyes. Projected from a computer onto his office wall is a color-coded map of the state. Across the top, it says, "South Dakota Victory GOP vs. Turnout Map." As reports from precincts roll in, the map is updated, changing through a spectrum of colors to reflect the level of success at pulling Republican voters in. Right now, much of the map is a disappointing color, so he is frantically pulling people from poll-checking stations and phone banks and sending them into neighborhoods with lists of Republicans who haven't voted. (Always optimistic, Larry gives me one piece of good news: "In Tom Daschle's home county, we're at fifty percent." By the end of the day, that number will drop to 42 percent.)

Much of the Thune family gets sent onto the streets of precinct 2-9, and that's how I find myself riding shotgun with the representative's brother-in-law, Greg. It's just the beginning of our road trip, and things are going smoothly. We park and move quickly from house to house. Greg urges the stragglers to get to the polls. The family passes finished sheets to Tim in the Montero, and he hands over new ones for them to complete. Greg keeps asking Tim if we are finished yet. But Tim is all business. After completing the east and west sections of 2-9, he yells at us, "We did the bookends, and now we're going to pinch the middle." Greg looks at me, confused. "I'm from the farm, what does that mean?" I start to explain what the precinct looks like, but Tim interrupts. Some of the Thunes have to go to the bathroom, he announces. John Thune needs fewer than one vote per precinct to beat Johnson, but nature calls. "Let's hit the pits, drain our bladders, and get a game plan," Tim yells, and we are off to the Get N Go. Chatting in the car, I realize Greg and his wife may be too nice for this work. Greg tells me that he feels a little bad about ignoring all the Democratic voters in the neighborhood and would prefer to urge everyone to get to the polls. "Especially in a country that had nine-eleven, the sniper, and Bill Clinton," he adds. His wife, Karen, worries about bothering people during supper.

It's after our pit stop that we lose Tim's Montero. But a quick call to his cell phone, and we find each other again. There's only an hour and a half left before the polls close, but we have several sheets worth of Republicans to flush out. It looks like I will have to help out if John Thune is to win. Tim has a plan for Greg and me. He wants us to take the list for Tarmac Drive and work as a tag team, splitting up the houses as we make our way down the street. "Just holler back and forth at each other," he says. Greg is a little perplexed and reminds me that he is from Nebraska. "Ryan and I are doing what?" he asks Tim. But, before Tim answers, our whole operation comes to halt. It's 6:00 p.m.—the polls are closing in an hour—and Tim checks in with headquarters. Our mission is called off. Turns out it was only a 71-hour task force.

The final results for precinct 2-9 are 698 votes, or 56 percent, for Thune, and 546 votes, or 44 percent, for Johnson—victory, but hardly a blowout. And, even though the campaign hit its goal in the precinct, Johnson received 62 more votes than there are registered Democrats, while Thune received 215 fewer votes than there are registered Republicans. In Minnehaha County as a whole, which Larry and Phil were personally responsible for, Johnson won 52 percent to 48 percent, despite a 6,400 voter-registration advantage for Republicans. And, of course, statewide Thune lost the election by 528 votes, pending a possible recount. It turns out it *was* statistically possible for him to lose, and there's a good chance that Larry and Phil's 6,000 volunteers unwittingly turned out the Johnson Republicans that provided the margin of victory.

But Democrats have little reason to celebrate. Outside of South Dakota, Republicans uniformly outperformed Democrats on the ground for the first time since 1994. Larry may have been right: "This is the future of the Republican Party." ■

"Don't ask, don't tell" v. the war on terrorism.

Perverse

By Nathaniel Frank

On October 25, one week after CIA Director George Tenet warned that the United States now faces a terrorist threat every bit as grave as it did the summer before the September 11 attacks, the Council on Foreign Relations issued the most sobering report to date: "America remains dangerously unprepared to prevent and respond to a catastrophic terrorist attack. In all likelihood, the next attack will result in even greater casualties and widespread disruption to American lives and the economy."

The key to preventing that kind of calamity, most experts agree, is intelligence. And one of the basic requirements of good intelligence about the Arab world is the ability to speak

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its language. Unfortunately, study after study has indicated that the U.S. government faces a severe shortage of Arabic speakers. Less than one month after September 11, 2001, a House Intelligence Committee report criticized the FBI, CIA, and National Security Agency (NSA) for relying on "intelligence generalists" rather than linguists with expertise in a specific foreign language, culture, and geographical area. The report concluded that "at the NSA and CIA, thousands of pieces of data are never analyzed, or are analyzed 'after the fact' because there are too few analysts; even fewer with the necessary language skills. Written materials can sit for months, and sometimes years, before a linguist with proper security clearances and skills can begin a translation." According to a Government Accounting Office (GAO) study released in January 2002, in 2001, the U.S. Army, FBI, and State and Commerce Departments failed to fill all their jobs that required expertise in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Farsi, or Russian. The GAO study concluded that staff shortages at these agencies "have adversely affected agency operations and compromised U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism and diplomatic efforts." As recently as last month, the Associated Press reported that the Army faces such a critical shortage of Arabic speakers that it is considering recruiting non-Americans from Middle Eastern countries into its Special Forces teams.

Which makes it all the more shocking that, in a two-month period this fall, the Defense Language Institute (DLI)—an elite training school for military linguists in Monterey, California—discharged seven fully competent Arabic linguists. The reason? They were discovered to be gay.

DLI IS A language-training center run by the Army, but soldiers from all major military branches study there. Because of its battery of entrance tests and the intensity of its courses, DLI is reputed to attract students who are older and more skilled than most enlisted personnel. Its Northern California location also, it seems, attracts a large share of gay students. "There were way too many gay people at DLI for anybody to fear the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy," says one gay former student who arrived at DLI in 2001. While there, he was out to all his gay peers and to any enlisted personnel who seemed gay-friendly. "Nobody cared," he explains. "I knew someone who was a flaming queen in a uniform, and nobody cared. Sometimes we lived on halls that were more than 50 percent homosexual. ... I never even got a sideways glance."

Still, this tolerant atmosphere does not extend to commanders, who, when a soldier's homosexuality is clearly discovered, are forced by federal law to pursue and expel him. This includes highly trained linguists like Alastair Gamble, an Emory University–educated Army specialist fired from DLI this August after completing more than 30 weeks of intensive Arabic. (DLI's Arabic course requires 63 weeks for a basic knowledge, compared with only 25 weeks for Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese, and only the strongest students are selected to take it.) Gamble was a human-intelligence collector, a position the GAO report cited as one of the Army's "greatest foreign language needs." And Gamble was a catch for DLI in other ways, too. He had studied German for seven years in high school and continued in college, where he also studied Latin and linguistics. Once in the Army, he completed interrogation training, a nine-week intelligence course that trains a small number of soldiers to collect information through direct questioning techniques. He then spent six weeks working for the Foreign Area Officer program, which trains officers to work with U.S. allies, where his performance won him a Certificate of Commendation from his commander. He entered DLI in June 2001 to study Arabic and earned a perfect 300 on his physical fitness test. Gamble reports that his grades placed him at the top of his class and that several teachers told him they thought he was the strongest student in the class.

In April, Gamble was finishing his second semester of the Arabic basic course at DLI when, during a surprise "health and welfare" inspection at 3:30 a.m., he was caught in his room with his boyfriend, also an army language specialist. (In eight months of dating, the two men say they had never before broken visitation policies. But Gamble's boyfriend was nearing the end of his course and preparing to relocate to Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas. As their separation approached, they decided they could risk one night of sleeping side by side.) After the two men were found in bed, nearly a dozen people searched the room while Gamble was escorted to his First Sergeant's office. Gamble says he was not yet thinking about being discharged. "I was just absolutely embarrassed," he recalls. "There's really nothing like having someone who's your age, but a slight rank above you, discussing whether or not lube is sufficient evidence to prove homosexuality. It's like getting felt up; it's horrible." The search turned up a gay-themed, non-pornographic film, photographs showing affectionate, but not sexual, behavior between Gamble and his boyfriend, and several gift cards expressing romantic sentiments. Two weeks later, Gamble was officially notified that his unit was initiating an investigation into his sexual orientation. He was pulled from class and honorably discharged on August 2. About eight weeks later, his boyfriend was discharged as well.

Gamble and his boyfriend are not alone. The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a legal aid and advocacy organization that assists men and women harmed by "don't ask, don't tell," announced in its latest quarterly report that it had assisted six other Arabic speakers recently discharged from DLI for being gay. Though only two chose to speak publicly, SLDN reports that all seven soldiers were fired while in the midst of, or having completed, the intensive DLI Arabic training course.

THE ARMY HAS cast the firings as routine enforcement of Army regulations. Harvey Perritt, a spokesman for U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, says the expulsions of competent Arabic linguists are "not relevant" to the nation's current war against largely Arabic-speaking ter-

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rorists. He insists that discharges resulting from "don't ask, don't tell" are consistent with those for other violations of Army regulations. "If someone is enrolled somewhere and they don't pass the P.T. [physical training] standards," he says, by way of comparison, "they'll be discharged. There are policies and they are always in effect."

But, regardless of what you believe about gays in the military, that's just not true. Both during the Gulf war and after the September 11 attacks, the Pentagon authorized "stop-loss" orders, allowing branch secretaries to retain soldiers who would otherwise be discharged for committing petty crimes, minor physical shortcomings, or other reasons. What's more, the military even has a history of suspending personnel policies regarding gays and lesbians during wartime, when it needs maximum retention of soldiers. In 1991, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the Pentagon had allowed homosexuals to serve in the Persian Gulf, despite a ban on all gay service, and only moved to discharge several gay veterans after the war ended. For his best-selling 1993 book, *Conduct Unbecoming*, the late *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Randy Shilts interviewed two Arab-language specialists fired from the Army for being gay. According to Shilts, the NSA contacted the two when the Gulf war began, begging them to return to service to help the war effort. (The two men declined.)

In other words, the military implicitly acknowledges that, during wartime, the gay ban may undermine national security rather than protect it. And since its leaders have consistently argued that national security should be the only criterion for determining whether gays should serve, it may be time for a new look at an "interim" policy formulated nearly ten years ago. Today's war on terrorism is less about squadrons and battalions than about deciphering the behavior of a shadowy enemy who attacks in secret. For national security's sake, let's hope our leaders are finally ready to acknowledge in public what they've admitted privately for quite some time: It is this enemy that threatens our nation's freedoms and survival, not the open homosexuality of patriotic Americans standing ready to serve. ■

Kuwait City Dispatch

Cool Air

By Tish Durkin

Some of the country's leading charities have been investigated by the U.S. Treasury Department for possible links to terrorism. Militant Islamists plot the murder of American soldiers. A small but hard core of young men traveled to Afghanistan to join the Taliban.

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Saudi Arabia? Pakistan? No, Kuwait. The fatal shooting of a U.S. Marine on a road twelve miles east of Kuwait City last month may have shocked Americans who assumed that Kuwait had become an overwhelmingly pro-Western place. But it should not have stunned anyone who has followed the emirate in recent years, and it should serve as a cautionary tale for policymakers who believe Iraqis will reshape their country in America's image. Fact is, America's Gulf war campaign, while inspiring gratitude among nearly all Kuwaitis, did much less than Americans realize to revamp society or politics in the tiny emirate.

The first reason Kuwait has not become more pro-U.S. is the most obvious to a visitor: the rise of conservative Islam. Like other Gulf states, Kuwait has developed a veneer of Western practices, yet, over the past 30 years, it has actually become a more conservative Islamic society. Kuwait City is packed with Western restaurants, and TV stations feature "Friends," but alcohol is banned throughout the emirate, as is eating a candy bar in the street during Ramadan. An out-of-wedlock birth can lead to a criminal investigation. Even books and videos that are mail-ordered for private use must first pass through the Ministry of Information censors for a decency check.

The Gulf war did not stop Kuwait's Islamization. In 1996, Islamists in parliament began pushing the government to restrict interaction between men and women at the university. In July 2002, Education Minister Misaed al-Haroun committed the school, which has always been co-educational, to a very expensive process of gender segregation.

Islamic conservatism does not guarantee anti-Americanism, but, as in other parts of the Arab world, the rise of hard-line religion makes some Kuwaitis more willing to favor the side of Islam in any situation that pits Muslims against non-Muslims. Recent polls indicate a decline in popular support for the United States. And a small minority of these anti-American conservatives have turned to violence. The two young Kuwaiti gunmen involved in the killing of the Marine may have been acting on orders from Al Qaeda, which, authorities later revealed, had an active cell in Kuwait. After the shooting, Kuwait's Interior Ministry revealed that militants in the emirate had been planning more assaults on American citizens.

But conservative Islam is not the only reason for Kuwait's coolness toward U.S. ideals and policies. Kuwaitis express gratitude for the Gulf war and the continuing U.S. military presence: Many Kuwaitis welcomed me warmly. "After September 11, Tony Blair said that the U.S. had been with England in its hour of need, so now England must be with the U.S," one Kuwaiti liberal told me. "We feel exactly the same way." But despite this gratitude, Kuwaitis see their relationship with the United States as a transaction, a deal similar to those they have made with many other foreign workers.

Long before the Gulf war, Kuwaitis viewed the massive imported workforce—only 800,000 of the emirate's 2.2 million residents are Kuwaiti citizens—as a largely separate population. The foreigners perform most of the country's jobs, including many professional positions, but rarely make an

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impact on Kuwaiti society, politics, or values. Non-Kuwaitis, for instance—except those from Gulf Corporate Council states—can never own property. Whether they live there for three months or three generations, foreigners rent.

Kuwaitis view their military, made up largely of foreigners, with much the same detachment, and they transfer this sentiment toward the American military—viewed as a respected but alien protector. Sri Lankans clean houses. Lebanese run hotels. Egyptians drive cabs. Americans defend the country. Historically, in Kuwait, military service fell to the *bidoon*, people who live in Kuwait but who do not have citizenship. Today, the *bidoon* tend to be refugees from the Iran-Iraq war. Since the Gulf war, the military, like other institutions, has been called upon to redress its Kuwaiti-to-non-Kuwaiti ratio. Nonetheless, many *bidoon* still serve, and *bidoon* still do not have social status.

And so, Kuwait's military remains dominated by foreign soldiers, who get little respect and exacerbate Kuwaitis' view that they have little to learn from their military protectors. One day, I visited a man who works on behalf of Kuwait's prisoners of war. During the occupation, the Iraqis arrested his son, who has not been heard from since. That morning, the man was fuming—not about Saddam Hussein but about his nephew, an army recruit who had not shown up for duty in weeks.

It is not obvious what the United States could have done to help the country liberalize its society and pseudodemocratic political system, given Kuwaitis' transactional view of foreigners and their resistance to change. When the emir did issue an edict allowing women to vote, the elected parliament blocked the move.

But, in retrospect, America's assumption that one episode—the Gulf war—would radically reshape Kuwait looks deeply naive. Not comprehending that simply kicking out Saddam will not alter Kuwait, America has invested little time and money in convincing Kuwaitis that the United States–Kuwait relationship is more than a transaction. After all, after the war, Congress proposed that contracts for the reconstruction of Kuwait go to American firms.

What's more, American diplomats in the region have not been allowed to reach out to Kuwaitis. The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City is chronically underfunded and understaffed, making it harder for U.S. diplomats to promote American beliefs and policies to the average Kuwaiti or to help puncture Kuwait's torpor. Saud Alanezi, a sociology teacher and a liberal activist, compared life in Kuwait to a tape loop that the invasion, occupation, and liberation had put on hold. "And then," he told me sadly, "it went right back on 'play.'" ■

The life of a liberal Muslim.

Moral Hazard

By Franklin Foer

The death threats began shortly after September 11, 2001. Every few days, for about four months, Khaled Abou El Fadl would receive an angry, anonymous phone call at either his San Fernando Valley home or his UCLA office. In his e-mail inbox, he found ominous messages from obscured sources with warnings such as, "You know what we're capable of." At first, the pudgy, 39-year-old professor of Islamic jurisprudence dismissed the calls as harmless outbursts at a tense moment. But, as the fall of 2001 progressed, Abou El Fadl began suspecting that the threats were more serious than he had initially assumed. Twice in November, he noticed a van that inexplicably lingered outside of his relatively isolated home but then disappeared after he called the police. A few months later, he found the windows of his family's SUV smashed at a crowded movie theater parking lot. Neither the radio nor the cash in the car had been stolen; no other vehicle in the lot had been touched.

When he brought these incidents to the attention of police, they requested—and he granted—permission to tap his home phone. UCLA installed a red panic button next to his desk, ensuring that campus cops could respond within minutes to any crisis in his office. The FBI even assigned an agent to track down his tormenters. (To date, they have not been found.) All of this might sound like the prelude to a textbook hate crime, but the Abou El Fadl case has a twist: The callers weren't angry white men accusing him of terrorist sympathies; they were fellow Muslim Americans accusing him of selling out the faith.

On September 14, 2001, Abou El Fadl had published an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times*. Many Muslim Americans had condemned the week's attacks as un-Islamic. But Abou El Fadl felt this response amounted to an evasion. The attacks, he worried, didn't represent a deviation from mainstream Islam; they reflected a crisis at the core of the faith, the logical conclusion of "a puritanical and ethically oblivious form of Islam [that] has predominated since the 1970s." Centuries of Islamic intellectual development had been destroyed by the "rampant apologetics" of Muslim thinkers, which had "produced a culture that eschews self-critical and introspective insight and embraces projection of blame and a fantasy-like level of confidence and arrogance."

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Abou El Fadl had, for years, made essentially the same argument in his scholarly writings, particularly the books *And God Knows the Soldiers* (1997) and *Speaking in God's Name* (2001). With imams justifying suicide bombings in Israel and elsewhere, Abou El Fadl had voiced concern that Islam had been "rendered subservient to political expedience and symbolic displays of power." And he'd railed against the ascendance of Wahhabism, a rigidly puritanical brand of Islam exported and subsidized by the government of Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabis insist that Islam must recover the practices of the "golden age"—the decades that followed the prophet's death—and dismiss subsequent centuries of interpretation and intellectual exploration as devilish sophistry. It is that thoughtful, pluralist tradition that Abou El Fadl wants to recover, an "ethos where the numerous traditions ... emphasiz[ed] that pursuit of knowledge is an act of permanent worship."

Whereas the thrust of modern Christian history has been toward decentralization, Sunni Islam has undergone a rapid period of theological consolidation. In the faith's first century and a half, Abou El Fadl estimates that 135 legal schools competed to influence the religion. Even up until the last part of this century, Greek-inspired rationalists (*mu'tazila*) argued against puritanical literalists (*ahl-al-hadith*) and strict constructionists (*usulis*). But with Saudi money, and in the guise of Wahhabism, the *ahl-al-hadith* have of late won the upper hand. And, unlike other traditions that accommodate dissenting views, the Wahhabis claim to possess an undebatable vision of "true Islam." Abou El Fadl, by contrast, comes from the ever-shrinking *usuli* school. As he describes *usulism*, it is a conservative tradition. To protect the Koran's integrity, *usulis* impose a stiff test for the derivation of God's laws. For edicts to carry divine imprimatur, they must be unambiguously stated in the Koran or *sunna* (the body of literature that includes the sayings and biography of the prophet). "You have to be willing to bet your soul that law is God's will," he argues. "Otherwise you might be guilty of arrogance in the eyes of God."

Paradoxically, the *usulis*' theological conservatism makes them quite liberal relative to much of the current Muslim world. While Wahhabis assert the necessity of veiling women, for example, Abou El Fadl and other *usulis* point to texts casting doubt on God's intention that women's faces be constantly covered. (The Koran urges the veil specifically to protect against molestation, notes Abou El Fadl; if there's no threat of molestation, there's no need for the veil.) Likewise, the *usulis* reject many of the Wahhabis' other proscriptions—guidelines for sex, prohibitions against keeping pet dogs and women attending funerals—as passages plucked from context that ignore vast chunks of the holy books. But what bothers Abou El Fadl most about Wahhabism isn't simply its textual distortions. It is the tradition's denigration of morality, which the Wahhabis argue shouldn't affect the implementation of Koranic law. Abou El Fadl insists that his *usuli* tradition naturally leads Islam to an ethical humanism—a set of ideas about justice and beauty that help to achieve God's will. "If the intent and moral vision do not exist, then the rules become meaningless pedantry," he argues. Indeed, he considers much of modern Islam to be a tyranny of the picayune. As he wrote in the introduction to his 2001 collection of essays *Conference of the Books*, "I pray that this is a passing phase in the history of Islam and that Muslims will regain their intellectual vigor and enlightened spark."

Abou El Fadl is part of an international movement of Muslim intellectuals who oppose the extremism of the Wahhabis. It includes the Syrian theorist Mohammad Shahrour, the Italian imam Abdul Hadi Palazzi, and the Egyptian jurist Muhammad Imara. Abou El Fadl has his own informal cluster of American dissident scholars, which self-deprecatingly calls itself the "consolation club"—in e-mail and phone calls, they console each other. They trade stories of receiving death threats, being protested by their own radical students, and being constantly tempted by the enticements of Saudi emissaries who offer grants and endowed chairs in exchange for their theological conformity. Even in the West, dissident thinkers like Abou El Fadl have been shut out of mainstream Islamic institutions. To find an intellectual home, they reside in secular academia, where they grow even further removed from potential constituents. It's a condition that breeds depression and deep cynicism. When I ask Abou El Fadl about his hope for the future of Islam, he pulls a Diet Coke from the mini-refrigerator next to his desk before lighting a cigarette and smoking it out his window. "The chances are that I would be appreciated by a rabbi interested in interfaith discussions far more than I will be by a leader of a Muslim organization," he says. After a few puffs, he rubs the cigarette into the sill and throws it from the window. "It's very disheartening and discouraging. The reason I'm speaking so openly is that I'm fed up to the core."

For centuries, the Abou El Fadl family included jurists who studied in the schools affiliated with Cairo's Al Azhar mosque, the venerable epicenter of Sunni Islamic thinking—Islam's Oxbridge. But for the epicenter of Sunnism, it had a strange history: The mosque had been founded by Shia from Tunisia in the tenth century. Perhaps, because of this lineage, Al Azhar tolerated dissident sects long after the Shia vacated the mosque in the twelfth century. Proponents of nearly all varieties of Islamic legal thinking—*mu'tazila*, *ahl-al-hadith*, and *usuli* alike—found intellectual homes in Al Azhar. To be sure, Al Azhar shifted with the politics of the times. After Napoleon conquered Egypt in 1798, the mosque's leaders made slandering the French occupiers a religious crime; during the Ottoman era, the school excelled at producing pliant scholars versed in the empire's favored *hanafi* legal school. But, for the most part, Al Azhar's acceptance of intellectual diversity continued regardless of fluctuations in Egypt's political leadership.

At least up until the post-colonial era, that is. In 1961, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the school. Sheiks at Al Azhar became government-paid

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functionaries—and were expected to conduct themselves as such, promoting Nasser's vision of a secular pan-Arab socialism. As Gilles Kepel, the French historian of political Islam, writes in his book *Jihad*, "By linking the reformed Azhar institution too directly to the state, Nasser's regime deprived it of credibility. ... A vacuum had been created, to be filled by anyone ready to question the state and criticize governments in the name of Islam."

The vacuum was filled by proponents of radical Islamism—first by theorist Sayyid Qutb (who was hung by Nasser in 1966) and his comrades in the Muslim Brotherhood and then, more gradually, by Wahhabi clerics supported by Saudi Arabia. In 1962, Saudi Arabia founded the Muslim World League to fund the distribution of Korans, the production of Wahhabi scholarship, and the building of mosques throughout the globe. And, over the course of the next four decades, the Saudis steadily purchased the ideological direction of Al Azhar. It started subtly, with cushy Gulf sabbaticals for scholars. "In six months on sabbatical, they would earn twenty years' salary," says Abou El Fadl. As these contributions became more customary—and scholars became increasingly eager to supplement their $40-a-month salaries—the Saudis expanded their influence. Through the Muslim World League, they began endowing chairs for scholars and funding departments. By the late '90s, it was growing difficult to find an Azhari who hadn't benefited from Saudi largesse—and who hadn't returned the favor with pro-Wahhabi scholarship.

When Abou El Fadl began studying with the Azhari sheiks, in 1969 at the age of 6, the mosque was in the midst of this transition from religious diversity to Wahhabi predominance. Signs of moderation still existed: Following Abou El Fadl's adolescent flirtation with Islamism—during which he destroyed his sister's Rod Stewart tapes and fulminated against mixed gatherings—the sheiks persuaded him to adopt a more moderate path. But, over the years, Abou El Fadl noticed the increasing presence of Saudi money and of Wahhabism. For years, one of his most beloved teachers, Muhammad Jalal Kishk, had mocked the ignorance of Wahhabi Islam. But, in 1981, after Kishk received the $200,000 King Faisal Award and the $850,000 King Fahd Award from the Saudi government, he published a pro-Wahhabi tome called *The Saudis and the Islamic Solution*.

Today, the takeover of Al Azhar is largely complete. The highest-ranking sheik in the once-moderate institution, Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi, endorses suicide bombings. And Al Azhar has bullied the Egyptian government into granting it power to censor all books on Islam. As the university's president told *Al-Ahram Weekly* last year, "Freedom is restricted by respect for God, his prophet and all religious values." Many Azharis who refused to toe the Wahhabi line have been purged from the institution. Abou El Fadl tells the story of another of his teachers, Muhammad al-Ghazali. Even though al-Ghazali was among the more conservative Azharis, he grew impatient with the rising anti-intellectualism at the school. In 1989, he published a book called *The Sunna of the Prophet: Between the Legists and Traditionalists*, accusing the Wahhabi of justifying fanaticism and defiling Islam's reputation. Within two years, the Saudis subsidized the publication of seven books trashing al-Ghazali. At three Muslim World League–sponsored conferences in Saudi Arabia, scholars lined up to dismiss his arguments. Even the Saudi newspaper, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, issued its own lengthy rebuttals. But, what most pained al-Ghazali, according to Abou El Fadl, was not the Saudi smear campaign but watching his old students—many of whom had received Saudi fellowships and book advances—remain silent amid the uproar. At the time, al-Ghazali told Abou El Fadl, "I never realized how bad it has become until this instance. I realize that the foreseeable future is lost." After years of suffering polemics, Abou El Fadl told me, "al-Ghazali died of a broken heart."

IN MAY 1985, after Abou El Fadl completed his junior year at Yale, he returned home to Cairo for the summer. A few weeks earlier, Yale had named him "Scholar of the House," an award that *Al-Ahram* celebrated in its pages. In addition to his academic work, Abou El Fadl had spent the year studying for certification in a top-level field of Islamic jurisprudence called *hadith* authentication. Now, at home with his Azhari teachers, he put the final touches on his preparation. One evening, as he left his study circle, however, two plainclothes Egyptian policemen approached him. Without explanation, they shoved him in a truck and blindfolded him. Abou El Fadl later discovered that they had taken him to the basement of a detention

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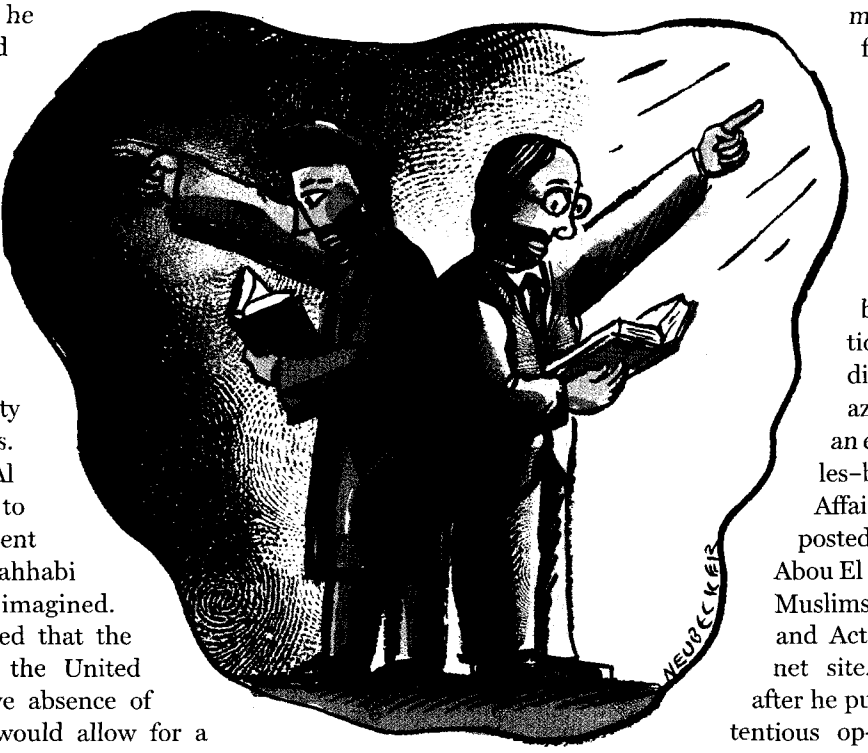
center called Lazoughli. "You think that you're scholar of the house," his interrogators declared sarcastically as they beat him. Next, the police transferred him to a notorious desert prison called Tora, rumored to be surrounded by the makeshift graves of torture victims. Abou El Fadl was suspended from the ceiling by his left arm for six-hour intervals; guards shocked him with electricity and pulled out his fingernails. After three weeks, and without a conviction, they released him.

This was not the first time Abou El Fadl had been targeted by police. As a teenager, he had published anti-regime poetry and stories in the opposition dailies and had twice been taken in for beatings. But, whereas many of Abou El Fadl's contemporaries responded to such police-state tactics by embracing militant Islamism, the abuse only magnified his desire to find a community where he could speak his mind without fear of retribution from either secular or religious authorities. And so, after his 1985 visit, Abou El Fadl returned to the United States in self-imposed exile. He had high hopes for the Muslim community in the United States. Unlike the scholars at Al Azhar, they didn't have to contend with government censorship and Wahhabi oppressiveness, he imagined. "Naively, I had assumed that the freedoms afforded in the United States, and the relative absence of political persecution, would allow for a Muslim intellectual rebirth," he writes in the introduction to *And God Knows the Soldiers*. He even daydreamed that American Muslims might form a diaspora movement that would return to remake the Middle East.



But, instead of tolerance, Abou El Fadl found a community that wasn't significantly more open than the one he'd left behind. Where he expected vibrant intellectual debate, he found rigid conformity to Wahhabi-like practices. "As I move from mosque to mosque, I encounter Muslims who seem to think that the harsher and the more perverse the law, the more it's Islamic," he says. He noticed that American imams often lacked even the rudiments of Islamic education. And he noticed that community leaders worried more about combating criticism of their organizations than about building educational institutions. "Despots," he calls them.

After finishing graduate school at Princeton in 1995, Abou El Fadl began publicly criticizing mainstream Islam, and it was not long before it got him in trouble. In 1997, while teaching at the University of Texas, he was driven from his mosque, the Islamic Center of Greater Austin. Finishing Friday supplications, he was interrupted by a man who "kindly invited" him into the building's boardroom. Entering the room, he found 15 men sitting around a long table. They took turns condemning his scholarship as heretical. A board member stood up and pronounced him "the great Satan." Abou El Fadl left the room. But congregants began to trail him on the street. One took off his shoe and began swinging it at him. The attack only stopped after the intervention of a passing graduate student.

But the post–September 11 backlash was much greater. The criticism that followed his *Los Angeles Times* op-ed was not limited to anonymous threats; it came from good friends, too. This past summer, he was banned from *The Minaret* magazine, a publication to which he had contributed a monthly column for nearly 20 years. "Good luck with your career that is based on self-promotion and self-aggrandizement," the magazine's editor wrote in an e-mail. The Los Angeles–based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) posted condemnations of Abou El Fadl on the American Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism (AMILA) Internet site. And, several days after he published another contentious op-ed this summer, a lawyer with ties to MPAC began representing Abou El Fadl's ex-wife of ten years in a custody battle. "My son has been living with me for the past ten years. Suddenly, their lawyer is representing her in her lawsuit filed against me," he says. "They've made it personal." In an e-mail to Abou El Fadl, MPAC denied all involvement in the custody suit.

Last month, Abou El Fadl had been scheduled to lecture at the University of Kuwait on the subject of Islam and democracy. He'd been looking forward to the talk, a rare opportunity to address Islamic intellectuals in the Middle East. But, a week before the lecture, he caught wind of a disturbing rumor. A dissident within the Saudi government told a friend of his that the Saudis planned to pick him up and make him disappear. "The Kuwaitis would say, 'We don't know what happened,'" he explains. "Everyone would be interested for a while; then, it would be forgotten like everyone else." Abou El Fadl canceled the trip.

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Even within the confines of Western academia, the Saudis have attempted to impose their Wahhabist interpretation of Islam, to re-create their takeover of Al Azhar. And, just as with the Azharis, their primary inducement has been monetary. There's no better way to gauge the Saudi effort than by reading off the names of prominent Middle Eastern studies departments and the gifts they have received from the Saudi royal family. Five years ago, King Fahd gave Oxford University more than $30 million to its Islamic Studies Center. In 1994, the University of Arkansas received a $20 million grant to begin the King Fahd Program for Middle East Studies. Thanks to a $5 million gift, U.C. Berkeley now houses the Sultan Bin Abdel Aziz Program in Arab Studies. Even Harvard has a chair, currently occupied by legal scholar Frank Vogel, called the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Adjunct Professor of Islamic Legal Studies—and subsidized by at least $5 million from the Saudis.

Ever since Abou El Fadl's days as a graduate student at Princeton, the Saudis have plied him with similar offers of wealth. In 1991, before he'd finished his dissertation, the Muslim World League offered him $100,000 to write a book on Islam; in return, however, it demanded "final editorial control." Abou El Fadl rejected the offer. Seven years later, the Saudis offered to nominate him for the $200,000 King Faisal award. After a preliminary phone call, Abou El Fadl stopped returning the Saudis' messages; they'd made him uncomfortable with too many leading questions about the "enemies of Islam." But, despite his past rejections, the Saudis have kept trying. Last year, they offered Abou El Fadl and his "guests" an all-expenses-paid "VIP" trip to Mecca for Hajj.

Abou El Fadl has rejected the offers because he's seen what Saudi patronage has done to the scholarship of his colleagues. He calls Vogel's book on Saudi law, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia*, "an embarrassment." (Vogel says he has no qualms about accepting Saudi money. "I saw it as something very much in the greater good of the Muslim world and particularly of Saudi Arabia," he told NPR in 1993.) In Abou El Fadl's view, the Saudi contributions have exacerbated the shift in Middle Eastern studies away from critical, secular analyses of modernization toward celebrations of Islamist "civil society." As the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Martin Kramer puts it, "The last places to look for anything critical are Berkeley and Harvard. There's nothing out there on opposition trends in Saudi Arabia. Because even if you aren't getting money, you're trying to get in the game."

To give me a sense of the Saudi advantage on the intellectual battlefield, Abou El Fadl took me on a tour of his massive home library. First, he showed me a Saudi-published five-volume set listing Islamic texts that good Muslims should never read. According to Abou El Fadl, the Saudis have even banned some of the works of their most important *ahl-al-hadith* jurist, the thirteenth-century Syrian Ibn Taymiyyah. Next, he pulled several books from the shelves. One, a volume from Riyadh, is leather-bound with a gold-leaf pattern on the spine that, when lined up with other books on the shelf, makes up a lovely mosaic. Next, he showed me the work of an important moderate jurist from Cairo. The pages have a quality a bit higher than toilet paper, and the printing looks like it was run off a mimeograph machine. Only 100 copies of the book exist, and, despite its low quality, it is expensive. The Wahhabi texts, by contrast, are not only beautiful, they're cheap, thanks to heavy subsidies from the Saudis.

"Islam is about the subjective engagement," Abou El Fadl told me, neatly encapsulating how his theological vision differs from the strident absolutism of Wahhabism. But, because he believes the true meaning of Islam should be continually debated, hashed out in arguments between jurists, he finds himself rhetorically disadvantaged when facing opponents who lay claim to ultimate truth. This asymmetrical warfare was on display last month, when Abou El Fadl went to Qatar to debate the morality of suicide bombings with Islamist Sheik Youssef al-Qaradawi, who preaches on the TV network Al Jazeera. (Al-Qaradawi had previously announced that those who shook hands with Shimon Peres should wash their hands "seven times, one time with dirt.") Abou El Fadl only agreed to the trip because the State Department had helped organize it and guaranteed his safety. Bodyguards maintained a constant watch over his hotel room.

In a conference room at the Doha Ritz Carlton, Abou El Fadl pointed out the logical inconsistencies in al-Qaradawi's defense of suicide bombing and cited pre-modern Islamic jurists on the ethics of revenge. But such details were of no interest to al-Qaradawi. According to Abou El Fadl, al-Qaradawi told the crowd of Muslim intellectuals and foreign journalists, "I don't know why brother Abou El Fadl keeps needlessly complicating things; Islam is against such complications," before going on to cite statistics about the murders of Palestinian children. By the end of the debate, Abou El Fadl felt that he'd been mocked, ignored, and rhetorically run over. Al-Qaradawi stopped addressing him by his proper title—sheik—and, as he left the stage, refused to shake hands. "It wasn't a fair fight," one participant told me later.

Two weeks after he returned from Qatar, Abou El Fadl got a visit from the FBI. The State Department, the agents told him, had asked them to set up a meeting: It wanted to ensure that his criticism of al-Qaradawi didn't result in any physical harm. Already, al-Qaradawi had mentioned their debate on his website, and it had unleashed a torrent of response. A group of social scientists in Egypt had e-mailed Abou El Fadl to tell him that they "prayed God would return him to a straight path." And he received similar messages from Jordan and elsewhere. A few days before the FBI visited, we had discussed the debate and the consequences of challenging popular imams. As he spoke, he stroked his blind terrier, Lulu. With a resigned tone, he told me, "There may need to be sacrificial lambs. I'm going to play this role and speak my conscience." ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Creating Creators

JULIE TAYMOR WON a high reputation in the theater as a designer—breathtaking, humorous, humane. She seemed not to be competitive with other designers; her work was wonderfully unique. In time she began to direct the productions she designed. In further time she both designed and directed *The Lion King*, which changed her from a (mere) exceptional artist to a nugget of uranium. She was then given the means to make her first film.

Taymor had once done a theater production of *Titus Andronicus*, and her first film was a cinematic version called *Titus*. It made me miserable. It reminded me of my book-publishing days, when sometimes a graphic artist would bring in a jacket design with clever arrangements of letters and spaces and forms—and only one drawback: you could not read the words. *Titus* was full of enticingly strange shots and lighting and camera movement. Its trouble was that it harried and hampered Shakespeare's text, characters, action. A powerful actor, Anthony Hopkins, played Titus, and it seemed as if once again he was confined within Hannibal Lecter's mask.

Thus the news that Taymor was making a film about the Mexican artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera did not make the blood tingle, especially since there had been a previous film on the subject—by Paul Leduc in 1984—that was mired in artiness. But the miracle happened. Many elements of **Frida** (Miramax) are extraordinary, but the prime marvel is that Taymor has, so to speak, turned the film over to her actors. Not often has a designer-director, from Gordon Craig to today, conceived a production as a means to let actors flourish. More often than not, the designer-director has seen his cast as (Craig's term for actors) *Über-marionetten*. But in *Frida*, which is about characters or is about nothing, Taymor has worked toward and for the acting.

She is rewarded. The two chief performances are splendid, and almost all the others are good. Salma Hayek, born in Mexico, has had twenty years of experience there and in the United States, but nothing of hers that I have seen before, attractive as she is, has promised the Frida Kahlo in this film. Hayek begins with the wayward, imaginative, "difficult" adolescent, politically radical, in Mexico City in 1922. A few years later Frida is in a dreadful bus accident, and after recovering from grave injuries she finds an outlet for her inner turmoil in painting. Brashly she takes some of her work to the famous Diego Rivera. He, amused by her daring (an amusement heightened by her beauty), agrees to look at one painting if she will leave it with him. Later he comes to her place to look at more, and is impressed by them and by her. He is twenty-one years older; still they become lovers and, in 1929, they marry. (Later they divorce and eventually re-marry.) Through all of this, Hayek is fiery and lavender and proud and vulnerable. She presents a Frida who is liberated not only in art but in sex, and, through Rivera, is thoroughly immersed in the Marxism that had already attracted her.

Oddly enough, Hayek's own fine performance depends, as does the whole film, on Alfred Molina's performance as Rivera. He is superb. Large, heavy, swift, he creates a Rivera who sometimes has a touch of the casual about both his genius and his libido, and who is unfailingly serious about only one matter: his communism. His murals are emblematic of the sufferings, the harassed life, of the peon. Trotsky said of Rivera: "In the field of painting, the October Revolution has found her greatest interpreter not in the USSR but in faraway Mexico." Taymor's film is hardly propaganda for the Octobrists: it would simply be jejune if it modified Rivera's politics. (Trotsky himself demonstrated that one can admire a great artist without endorsing his political views: see his essay on Céline.) Molina's performance is holistic. He gives us an ebullient, passionate man, an Atlas on whom rests the credibility of Frida's love and politics and the entirety of her world.

The screenplay is by four people, Clancy Sigal among them, and is based on a book by Hayden Herrera. The story follows the initial and recurrent happiness of the lovers, as well as Rivera's recurrent infidelities. When Frida objects, he asks her to regard a fuck as nothing more than a handshake. She then has her own adventures and gets a chance to return his remark. Her escapades are sometimes lesbian, including an interlude with a woman who has also been Diego's mistress. And Taymor features a slinking tango that Frida dances with a gorgeous woman, a reminder of the tango of Stefania Sandrelli and Dominique Sanda in *The Conformist*.

But the turbulent sexual lives of Diego and Frida, though engagingly steamy, are far from the whole of the film: their artistic and political beings take them further. Frida wins recognition of her own gifts. (André Breton likened her paintings to "a ribbon around a bomb.") In 1933 Diego and Frida go to New York, where Nelson Rockefeller has commissioned him to paint a mural in the new Rockefeller Center. In this mural, called *Man at the Crossroads*, Rivera includes a portrait of Lenin. Rockefeller demurs; Diego refuses to alter the mural; Diego is paid off; his art is removed. In 1937 Trotsky and his wife, in flight from Stalin's assassins, find asylum in Mexico City, first as guests in the Rivera home, later in a nearby house. Trotsky is attracted to Frida, and they have at least one sexual encounter. Trotsky making love—there is a sight to remember! (In the film's one mediocre performance, Geoffrey Rush plays Trotsky with little of the resonance that Richard Burton gave the man in *The Assassination of Trotsky*.)

In subsequent years, Frida begins to suffer physical troubles, apparently at least partly the aftereffects of her youthful accident. Then follows a long and painful slippage into death, while she continues working as best she can. The strappings and operations and corsetings are memorialized in many of her paintings, sometimes symbolically. Taymor often treats those paintings as if they were alive and were responding to our scrutiny of them.

The film score by Elliot Goldenthal, Taymor's frequent collaborator, is consistently helpful. The lush production design is by Felipe Fernández del Paso, who, we can feel, had the advantage of working for an eminent designer. Rodrigo Prieto's cinematography has lighting and color that are beautifully apt for a film about two

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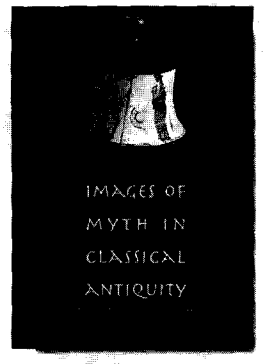

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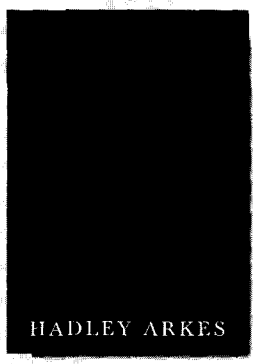

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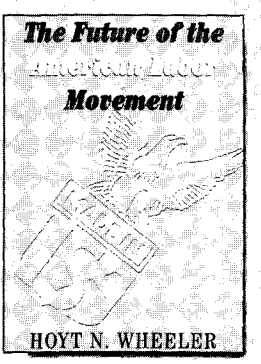

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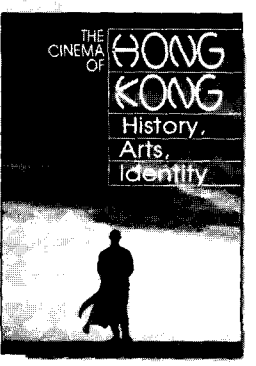

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painters. Taymor indulges in some stylistic pirouettes in her directing, but for the most part she simply pursues the story. (The special effects with Frida's paintings are her most memorable directing "touches.") She succeeds in the risky business of credibly portraying artists largely because she omits theatricalized moments of inspiration. She clearly foresaw that the true being of *Frida* was in the reality of two exceptional people making their way, with their gifts, through their circumstances—a common enough struggle of artists, but here exacerbated by physical troubles and the political strife in this time and place. Taymor's triumph is that her film, despite its distance from us in some ways, is pertinent and enthralling. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

Varieties of Histrionic Experience

THEATER HAS MANY objectives. It can be a source of instruction and amusement. It can serve as a catalyst for painful emotions. It can operate as a criticism of life and society. It can create a link between the individual and the world. It can build a temporary community among strangers. And, not least, it can provide great roles for strong actors. This season has begun with two examples of this last objective, which illustrates most of the previous ones: Al Pacino's Arturo Ui and Fiona Shaw's Medea.

Pacino first played the role of Arturo Ui about thirty years ago in a production by the Theater Company of Boston directed by David Wheeler. After capturing Hollywood's attention in a Public Theater production of *The Indian Wants the Bronx*, he did most of his later stage work with Wheeler's group. Pacino has always understood that it is an obligation of the serious-theater-trained movie star to return home periodically to sharpen his craft. He also has the good actor's understanding that you never finish working on a role. His obsession with the part of Richard Crookback, for example—which he also played first with Wheeler's company in the 1970s and was still examining as late as 1996 in his movie *Looking for Richard*—has proved valuable in preparing him for his work on *Arturo Ui*, a play partly based on a number of Shakespeare's works, *Richard III* included.

Brecht wrote **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui** as a cautionary tale in three weeks in 1941, possibly under the influence of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*. He revised the play on and off for the next fifteen years, but he never really got it right. Structurally, *Arturo Ui* is a clumsy elephant that Brecht tries to pull around by its whiskers. The plot wanders aimlessly around imaginary Chicago streets according to the author's whims and his reading material at the time. Among his satiric plunders are the wooing scene from *Richard III*, Banquo's death scene from *Macbeth*, and Marc Antony's oration from *Julius Caesar*, as well as the garden scene from Goethe's *Faust*.

Brecht is overly infatuated with his basic gimmick: namely, how Hitler and his goons resemble Chicago gangsters, such as Al Capone, or their Hollywood equivalents. This leads him to interpret Nazism as a product of economic materialism—a protection racket manipulated by greedy thugs—rather than as an ideology of world domination driven by racialist criminals. (He also entirely ignores Hitler's anti-Semitic policies.) And the relentless parallels between Ui's methods in taking over the cauliflower cartel and Hitler's alliance with Hindenberg, the Reichstag fire, the murder of Ernst Röhm, the suppression of the Brownshirts, and the *Anschluss* grow a little tiresome.

Still, in the late 1950s and 1960s the play provided the Berliner Ensemble with one of its most enduring repertory staples and gave the company's leading actor, Ekkehard Schaal, one of his greatest roles. (In a typical acrobatic moment, Schaal leaped onto a chair, toppled over the back of it, and landed on his feet, giving the Nazi salute.) Although Pacino lacks the same athleticism, he is on his way to matching that legendary performance. So is the rest of this splendid cast. Next time, maybe. The production, when I saw it halfway through the run, was still a bit rough and unfocused, which may explain why critics were discouraged from reviewing it. (There was no official opening night, and press seats were at a minimum.)

Using a slightly gussied-up version of George Tabori's colloquial translation, the splendid Simon McBurney has conceived an unashamedly theatrical mise-en-scène for the National Actors Company production (in association with McBurney's Theatre de Complicite in London). It fixes the action in a 1930s no-man's-land between stylized agitprop theater and tough-guy Warner Brothers movies. Conspicuously footlighted and punctuated by ominous stings and visual aids, with a sound score of tinny Depression-era hits such as "We're in the Money," McBurney's staging alters the perspective of the action at every opportunity. ("Let's look at this thing another way," says Ui, a cue for the entire cast to get up and change positions.)

Although the poor acoustics of the Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts at Pace University force everyone to be a little shouty, the cast is a dazzling assembly of mostly male movie character actors (and the wondrous Linda Emond, star of last year's *Homebody/Kabul*, in one of the few female roles). To see Steve Buscemi, Chazz Palminteri, Billy Crudup, Paul Giamatti, Charles Durning, John Goodman, Robert Stanton, Jack Willis, Dominic Chianese, and Tony Randall all on stage together—often unidentifiable, some playing small supporting roles in Ui's rogue's gallery of scum—is to have one's confidence in the acting profession restored. A few of the older actors occasionally have some trouble remembering lines. That is one of the liabilities of too much time spent before the camera. But they all give gallant and sometimes penetrating performances.

Randall, the company's founder and artistic director, is especially memorable as an aging, lank-haired Shakespearean actor laddie in a decaying velvet smoking jacket who teaches Ui how to goosestep, cross his hands over his genitalia, and rant. This scene is always the highlight of the play because it reduces Hitler to a tenth-rate ham in the same pinpoint way that Chaplin nailed him as a self-besotted maniac bouncing a balloon globe off his buttocks. (It is only a short step from here to Mel Brooks and the show-biz Führer of *The Producers*.) Also very effective are Goodman as Giri (Göring), in an outsize striped suit and two-tone shoes, and

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Buscemi as Givola (Goebbels), with his gravelly voice and clumsy clubfoot. What is lacking in the acting is the feeling of cohesion that marks a true acting company. An all-star team is unlikely to defeat even a second-division club that has been together long enough to learn each other's moves.

Pacino, however, is a company in himself. His transformation from derelict hood into master criminal is virtually a lesson in the art of acting. On first appearance he is down at the heels and morbidly unhappy, his hair tousled, his teeth snaggled, his head stuck forward like a buzzard. No matter how this "simple son of the Bronx" prospers and dominates, he never loses that air of sallow melancholic penury, suggested by the way his ratty T-shirt continues to show beneath his expensive leather coat. When Ui finally wrestles the seat of power from Old Dogsborough (Hindenberg), Pacino slumps into the comfortable leather armchair that doubles as a throne like a disgruntled mutt on his master's furniture. In the extravagant style of some of his recent movie characters, Pacino's Ui can throw a good tantrum when the occasion warrants, climbing over other actors, shaking chairs, rolling on the floor. But he is generally more clownish than dangerous, even when wooing Mrs. Dullfeet with his wheedling tenor or when threatening his enemies ("Nobody yields to force—unless he's forced to") with his self-serving choplogic.

By the end, having warned that "Who is not for me is against me," Ui announces that everyone is free to vote. A citizen who declares against him is summarily shot, and Ui is elected by a reasonable majority—not quite as huge as Saddam Hussein's recent triumph, but driven by a similar contortion of democracy. Unctuous and oily in his victory, Pacino's Ui accepts the people's "gratitude with pride," then (in an epilogue that Brecht wrote later) removes his moustache to inform the audience that while Hitler may be dead, "the bitch that bore him is in heat again." She is indeed. And bearing litters everywhere.

Deborah Warner, who once set Brecht's Chinese fable *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in the East End of London, has transferred Euripides's **Medea** to the construction site of what looks like a potential health club—unfinished brick walls, bundles of wooden planking, loose cinder blocks, and a small swimming pool that reflects a shimmering light on translucent sliding-glass doors. Toys are strewn around the area, little boats float on the pool, a child's medical kit and stethoscope lie on the ground. The chorus speaks in a variety of provincial accents—Cockney, Midlands, Northern, Irish, Scottish. Medea's Nurse is a young au pair neatening up the kids' furry animals and toy soldiers. For all the talk of Crete and Athens, we are obviously in contemporary England, listening to women gossip at the laundromat.

Medea's two boys run around in toy helmets, brandishing wooden swords. The Messenger carries a walkie-talkie. Jason is a sleek stud in a T-shirt, Reeboks, and jeans, who dumps Medea in order to marry Kreon's daughter because he wants "security, prosperity." His treatment of his wife alternates between impatience with her jealousy ("Must you take seriously what helps us all?") and a residual sexual need that makes him grope her behind like Stanley Kowalski pawing Stella. Warner's purpose, in this Abbey Theatre production, is to remove the masks and the cothurni of classical characters so as to endow them with a less distancing form of heroism. This effort is only moderately successful. The endless nattering of the multi-regional Chorus can get on your nerves, and you are never certain whether the narcissism of Jonathan Cake's Jason belongs to the character or the actor.

But the idea works beautifully in the performance of Fiona Shaw, Warner's creative partner. Unlike past approaches to the part—Judith Anderson's brooding sorceress, Diana Rigg's insinuating vamp—Shaw plays Medea like a British housewife betrayed by a philandering husband, whom she calls "vomit." Angular, gaunt, intense (Shaw looks like a painting from Picasso's Blue period), she makes her first entrance in a flowered skirt and a cardigan sweater, wearing sunglasses over her tear-puffed eyes. Speaking the colloquial translation of Kenneth McLeish and Frederic Raphael, she excavates the mordant comedy that comes from a pit of festering hatred, surgically slicing everything away from her character except the sinews, bones, and nerves.

It makes for an extremely naturalistic performance, but when this Medea finally shows her fury she is volcanic in the extreme, punching her stomach in rage and self-contempt. Shaw displays the bewilderment, the shock, and the anger of the abandoned wife and the displaced immigrant. She will take her revenge against the king who deported her, the husband who jilted her, and the woman who replaced her: "I've got one day to make all three chopped meat," she mutters between bites of a pie. Preparing to murder her children, she strips down to

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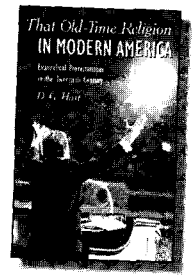

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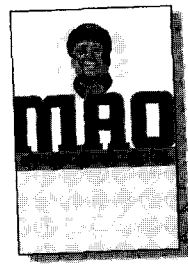

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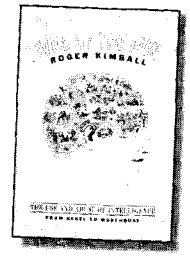

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black undies and returns with a small suitcase, brandishing a kitchen knife and wearing a white smock. The Messenger arrives to describe how Kreon and his daughter have died from Medea's poisonous presents ("her body stuck to him, his flesh tore from aging bone"). And to the accompaniment of deafening noise and blinding light, Medea proceeds to chase down her children with that murderous knife.

It is one of the most harrowing scenes I have ever witnessed in the theater. The children run, screaming. She captures one and a splash of blood washes over the glass doors; she snares another and a stain of red dyes her white smock. Some members of the chorus retch; one does a demented jig. A broken Jason rushes in for vengeance. Medea lets him see his slaughtered children, one boy lying on her lap like a bloodied pietà. In Warner's most radical departure from Euripides's text, Medea does not triumphantly ascend in a chariot, leaving Jason alone to cope with his tragedy. She stays, like a scrupulous housekeeper, to wash the blood off her hands and her smock, while probing her husband's psychic wounds ("You thought you could kick me from your bed and laugh at me") with vindictive scorn. It is the only unconvincing moment in the production. If Medea were so physically accessible, surely Jason would have finished her off. Instead he holds his wife's head under the water of the pool for a few moments and then, unaccountably, lets her go. But the choice allows for a brilliant final moment—Medea flicking water at her prostrate husband, he dissolved in grief, she half-smiling, half-mad, almost flirtatious. ■

Who is Carrie Bradshaw really dating?

Relationshipism

By LEE SIEGEL

ONCE UPON A TIME, in magical New York City, a certain cable-television station began broadcasting from its Midtown headquarters a weekly series about four single women who lived right there, in magical New York City. There was sunny, fair-skinned Charlotte York, with her dark eyes and shoulder-length dark hair, a WASP derived from New York high society who worked in an art gallery; Samantha Jones ("Sam" to her friends), a high-powered public-relations executive with her own firm, a caustic, bitter, formidable, startlingly all-of-a-sudden-masculine blonde who had, like, lunar sex with every man in sight; Miranda Hobbes, a corporate attorney and graduate of Harvard Law School, with pale electric-blue eyes and copper-red hair, who alternated disastrous dates with calamitous relationships; and last but certainly not least, Carrie Bradshaw, the blow-dried, straw-haired sylph, who wrote a column for the imaginary *New York Star* called "Sex and the City," which happened also to be the name of the series, now preparing its sixth season, each episode of which is told in Carrie's voice, through Carrie's deep, almost viscously thick blue eyes, eyes that seem to look right through you, and through the character of Carrie herself, to Sarah Jessica Parker, the self-adoring actress who plays the self-adoring Carrie.

A fusion of soap opera, self-help commentary, therapeutic consolation, and prime-time porn, *Sex and the City*'s stroke of brilliance has been to address, week after week, the consuming obsession of every unmarried person, straight or gay, male or female, living in a big American city: the Relationship. Or as Carrie inanely puts it in her weekly question—she asks a different one in her column each week, an interrogative pseudo-profundity that the episode then seeks to answer—"Have relationships become the religion of the nineties?"

SEX AND THE CITY
HBO

Having a "relationship," of course, is not the same as being together. Just as an attitude toward labor only hardened into an ideology called Marxism when the worker got cut off from the product of his labor, so erotic bonds only hardened into Relationshipism when people started, for a million familiar reasons, getting cut off from each other. A "relationship" is not to be confused with a union. It is an ongoing argument between two stubbornly sovereign selves about the possibility of a union.

About the infinite number of forms that this argument takes, *Sex and the City* can be very smart. If it is vulgar to judge high art by its effectiveness at reproducing "reality," it is myopic to approach television in any other way. Daily existence consists largely of putting out one little brush fire after another; and television is a fire extinguisher. No medium, even film, is as tied to everyday life as television. Everyone, or just about everyone, knows what's wrong, but who can say any more with absolute certainty what's right, especially in the realm of emotion and desire? At the core of *Sex and the City* is a kind of crisis center for bruised or befuddled hearts. It is appropriate that the show airs on Sunday evening, in the choppy wake of Friday and Saturday nights.

The questions that Carrie asks are easy to deride, with their silly self-centeredness, their marketing-executive idiom, their coin-operated impersonality. "In a gravity-free world, where everything goes, what constitutes cheating?" "When it comes to relationships, how do you know when enough is enough?" "In a city like New York, with its infinite possibilities, has monogamy become too much to expect?" But Carrie's questions point to a world, our world, where everything seems allowed yet where it is hard to figure out the consequences of that illusion; to a world where possibilities seem infinite, yet where no one seems to know how to feel when those possibilities turn out to be unnervingly limited. In this sense, the Relationship—in which everything is *not* allowed, because there is the boundary of the other person; and in which possibilities are finite, because there is the problem of two distinct lives, each with its own limitations and vulnerabilities—is a laboratory for a lot of present-day quandaries that no social or cultural authority can explain, or even clarify.

So *Sex and the City* gets high marks for dramatizing these inarticulable dilemmas. Should Miranda stick with—which means, in worldly Manhattan, settle for—slight, bespectacled Steve, her working-class bartender boyfriend, with his outer-borough accent and the added authenticity of his basketball, who wants only to be a bartender, and who is cuddly, and funny, and kind, but also resentful, and thin-skinned, and intellectually desolate? They are ultimately mismatched, but she is so lonely, and it is so brutal out there. Should Aidan, a handsome, rough-hewn, sensitive guy who likes to work with his hands and doesn't know the difference between Condé Nast and Thomas Nast, stay with Carrie after she tells him that she betrayed him with another man? She loves him, but

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she lied to him; she is with him, but how will he know she isn't lying again? The significance of these emotional snafus is small, but their symbolic resonance—how do you live a good life?—is not small.

THE PROBLEM IS that *Sex and the City*, once it mustered a striking frankness on the tube about urban men and women, has gone about squandering it. Instead of plunging into all the strange new present-day configurations of sex and emotion, the series has proceeded to divide sex from emotion. There is an abundance of fucking in *Sex and the City*, but it is the sort of fucking you did years ago, when you were very young, lying on the bed and cavorting in the head. As the series rolled along, you became aware of a damning artifice, an un-mimetic quality startling in a series that was supposed to be a candid look at urban life: none of these women is hurt by sex.

In urban America, you do not so much meet a romantic partner as inherit the product of someone else's romantic crimes. Someday someone will televise the real story of sex and the city and call it *Judgment at Nuremberg*. People get hurt, they become hard, they grow shrewd and wary. But these four women—a journalist, a public-relations executive, a corporate lawyer, and an art dealer, all high achievers, all in their thirties—are constantly humiliated, insulted, and embarrassed without the slightest effect on their egos or their self-esteem. The exception is Miranda, the show's token human being, wonderfully played by Cynthia Nixon, who, as the series has proceeded, has become more and more self-protective and withdrawn, an affecting protest against the show's indifference to the women's inner lives.

These are four single women in early middle age who appear to have been injured in just about every way a woman can get hurt by men, and they are not even on anti-depressants. After Charlotte goes off somewhere at a wedding with a man whom she has just met and has sex with him, they return to the reception, where, angered by something she says about his father, he loudly barks that he never wants to see her again and stomps off. Charlotte shrugs. Samantha meets for a drink a man who excuses himself for a minute; after half an hour goes by and he has not returned, Samantha goes looking for him and finds him in intimate conversation somewhere else in the bar with a younger woman. Even nymphomaniacs have feelings, but Samantha just rolls her eyes as though she were Lucy getting exasperated with Desi for the umpteenth time that evening. And before Miranda's transformation, she gets into a relationship with a guy who can only get aroused if he pushes her face out of the way and watches porn films over her shoulder while they make love. Another boyfriend, enraged by a mildly critical question Miranda had asked him—the men in this show are mostly angry creeps or mellow creeps—says to her as she is lying in his bed, "I'm going to take a shower. When I come out, I'd like it if you weren't here." Neither of these incidents upsets her much more than the breaking of a heel.

EVERY EPISODE RITUALISTICALLY has several scenes, usually set in restaurants over a meal, in which the women get together and talk about their romantic situations. But rather than talk about their adventures in terms of feelings or mental states, poignantly or angrily or comically, they speak about them almost exclusively in terms of sex. When they are not talking about "the classic dating ritual: the blow-job tug-of-war," or about "fucking your brains out," they are quipping, "If your friends won't go down on you, who will?" and discoursing interminably on anal intercourse.

It is not shocking to see women portrayed—though in comic caricature—talking the way women, when they are alone with each other, do talk sometimes (or so I assume), or to have part of the reality of female desire acknowledged on the small screen. What is startling is that for these smart, canny, emotionally alive women, pretty much every relationship comes down to the quest for sex—for perfect sex—as an end in itself. How many women, after years of dating creeps, would call off a relationship with a nice ophthalmologist because he doesn't always give them an orgasm? How many women have an orgasm just about every time they have sex with a man, a miraculous dispensation with which Carrie and her friends have been blessed? But breaking up with the nice ophthalmologist is exactly what Miranda does, she of the porn boyfriend and the angry boyfriend. Not much later she shuts up with a kiss a documentary film-maker, who actually, finally, for once, is talking on their first date about something besides sex, and something interesting, too. "Miranda," Carrie enthuses in the voice-over, "was pleased to discover that Ethan was just as passionate between the sheets as he was about film."

It would be quite the opposite, one would think, for women as experienced, and intelligent, and reflective about what they need and want as the show's quartet should be. "Passion"—to use a euphemism—between the sheets is not hard to come by on a first date. But rather than the tangled convergence of ego and emotion that physical intimacy is, the sex in this series is actually a refuge from sex, which—no matter how hard one might try to keep it pure—pretty quickly gets tangled up with ego and emotion. Sex in this series is like a sandbox. Its presence here is as unreal as its absence was on network television forty years ago.

THE DOMINANT FICTION projected by commercial society is that you can gratify yourself at no cost except to your wallet or your pocketbook; and *Sex and the City* has taken that illusion for reality. The show sublimates actual sex into ideal sex-in-an-emotional-vacuum in the same way that sitcoms from the 1950s sublimated actual family relations into ideal family relations. *Sex and the City* is *Leave It to Beaver* after dark. An absolute disjunction exists between the way the show portrays the women's harrowing experiences and the way it depicts their blithely bawdy conversations. It is like watching two different programs. And when the four are not talking about sex, they speak about experience in a kind of sales rep's idiom: "Soul mates: reality or torture device?"

Now, a part of the reason for the show's portrayal of women seeking sex for sex's sake is that the series' two creators, Darren Star and Michael Patrick King, are gay. On this level, *Sex and the City* is part of a long imaginative streak in popular art, a trend that includes Cole Porter and Lorenz Hart and George Cukor and Rock Hudson and most of the writers of the 1970s series *Bewitched* and many other gay figures whose portrayals of heterosexual life brilliantly subverted heterosexual conventions even as they were providing models for (unwitting) straight boys and girls. But there is a quality to *Sex and the City*'s subversions that is more bitter than playful, an element that is almost vindictive.

Running through *Sex and the City* is a subtext that amounts to a manifesto for a certain kind of raw, rough, promiscuous, anonymous gay male sex. Star and King sounded the call to arms in one of the very first episodes, when they had Stanford Blatch, Carrie's loyal gay friend, declare that "the only place where you can find love is the gay community. It's straight love that's closeted." A few seasons later, the women sit around watching gay-male porn films. "That's the way to do it," says Samantha, "no 'I love you'—just good old-fashioned fucking." Nobody contradicts her. One of the most recent of the half-

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hour-long episodes had the women finding happiness for a full ten minutes in a gay men's dance club. A segment this past season sent Carrie and Samantha, both blondes, on a train across the country, joking all the way about *Some Like It Hot*. Some of the quartet's boyfriends in the show's first two seasons actually wore their sweaters tucked into their pants; and if the actors playing these straight guys weren't gay, I'm Montgomery Clift. *Sex and the City*'s ongoing impersonation is admirably resourceful and daring. But the show's misogyny is not admirable at all.

Commenting on Sarah Jessica Parker's recent pregnancy, Michael Patrick King said: "Sarah's our workhorse, our show pony. We put her in high heels and tell her to run thirty blocks. Now, all of a sudden, she has to be babied." In its caricature of women who talk about sex like men, and, like men, have orgasms every time they have sex, the show represents a kind of counterattack on women's biology. The expensive, mismatched, chic-ugly clothes that Carrie wears; Sarah Jessica Parker's confused interpretations of her character as a black girl one episode and a self-conscious suburban cutie the next; Samantha's robotic-erotic, stud-like manner (and the sweaty, atrocious acting of Kim Cattrall, who could not stand still and convince you that she is a person standing still); the women's starry-eyed gold-digging; their countless humiliations: the picture of heterosexual life projected by *Sex and the City*, though it sometimes hits the nail right on the head, is the biggest hoax perpetrated on straight single women in the history of entertainment. The series' misogyny is matched by its homophobia: the only regular gay characters, Stanford and Anthony, are self-hating and flaming, respectively. Perhaps the exhilaration that the show provokes in some of its fans stems from the reactionary character of its assumptions about sexual identity.

YET *SEX AND THE CITY*'S assault on heterosexual romantic hope goes much deeper than its creators' psychosexual shenanigans. More than an ingenious affirmation of a certain type of gay-male sexuality, the show is a surrender to a certain type of socio-economic arrangement. For the series has skillfully turned what society still deems a deficiency of emotional strength—singleness—into what the economy considers an asset of calculated advantage—self-interest. Inviolable individuality is, after all, the hidden condition of Relationshipism.

By the fourth season, with the exception of Charlotte, who has been divorced, the four women were in their late thirties and still unmarried, and you began to realize that the show's premise of its protagonists searching in the city for love and happiness was meant from the beginning to culminate in disappointment—but disappointment funnily, sexily, even glamorously portrayed, until disappointment itself started to look like love and happiness, and the object of the search, someone to share your life with, acquired the aspect of a dystopian and dysfunctional fantasy. The men whom the four women meet are selfish, unfaithful, uncouth, hyper-neurotic shits, which seems about right; yet the show brings no decent guys their way except for the handful of men whom the women themselves immediately or eventually alienate—like the virile, kind, cultivated, gorgeous police detective whose near perfection makes a nervous Miranda drink herself into a stupor on their first date, prompting him to flee her apartment after leaving behind the address of her local Alcoholics Anonymous chapter (a very funny episode); or Aidan, the virile, kind, and gorgeous furniture-maker whom Carrie first sexually betrays and then, when a year later he forgives her and comes back, refuses to commit to, thus driving him away for good. Indeed, kindness in men arouses anxiety and suspicion in the women: Carrie sabotages a relationship with a smart, gentle magazine editor when he catches her rifling through his apartment, looking for the incriminating evidence that she is sure will prove that he's too good to be true. (She doesn't find it.)

The women, even the hapless, vulnerable, serious-minded Miranda, are magnetically drawn to callous, selfish men. It seems that the qualities that are sure to hurt them are also the qualities that they believe will protect them in *Sex and the City*'s money- and status-obsessed New York, a dazzling Darwinian demesne in which to move ahead you have to move fast, and to move fast you have to move alone. And so the four heroines are attracted to hard-hearted, fleet-footed guys, who are almost always affluent, and who are guaranteed to leave the women hard-hearted and fleet-footedly alone—that is, to leave them alone as fluid, insatiable consumers, unobstructed by a limiting couplehood.

The really revolutionary thing—in sitcom terms—about *Sex and the City* is that the show does not satirize the lucre-inflated bowels of Manhattan; it celebrates them, and it prefers them to the city's unquantifiable heart. The show has a kind of cartoon ideology of Manhattan. Every episode begins with a generalization about the city's glamour, wealth, cool, and cultural uniqueness that is breathtakingly disconnected from the actual New York: "Most single people in Manhattan do not buy furniture or hang pictures until faced with the arrival of out-of-towners." Huh? The show's creators actually seem terrified of what they nervously perceive as Gotham's reality. What are meant to pass as jaded aperçus really just reflect yuppie anxiety: "If you own, and he rents, it's emasculating."

SEX AND THE CITY is so much the creature of its fantasy of New York that its characters do not resemble any actual person who lives in New York. The four women never, until a couple of spats in the later seasons, fight with each other; and never express jealousy of each other; and never—except for Miranda when she is pregnant—collapse from exhaustion or work late. It is not even clear how the four of them—a scattered socialite, a workaholic and ambitious corporate lawyer, a power-hungry nymphomaniac, a newspaper columnist so narcissistic that she is hooked up mainly with her own clothes—would ever have become friends.

The sitcom's traditional role has been to comfort the viewer who feels burdened by the unreality of American expectations. Perhaps the greatest, and most innovative, feat of *Sex and the City* has been to unsettle viewers with the spectacle of people who have every material thing worth possessing—and night after night of great sex to boot—and to keep them masochistically coming back for more, as if to avoid the show's images of material and sexual perfection were to admit one's material and sexual imperfections. Like *New York* magazine, with its endless lists of "best" and "top," and *The New York Observer*—where "Sex and the City" first appeared as a column—with its slavish pursuit of the hip and the exclusive, *Sex and the City* has won a good part of its audience by instilling in its viewers massive amounts of anxiety, a mood that can be allayed only by turning on the show and belonging to it. Like the elusive, eternally uncommitted Carrie's elusive, eternally uncommitted Mr. Big, *Sex and the City* is the remedy for the distress that it causes.

With *Sex and the City*, the folks at HBO have created just this kind of cold and remote object of desire; a commodity eternally alluring, like the show's conception of Manhattan itself. "I'm dating the city," reveals Carrie, with typical wide-eyed cynicism, in a recent episode in which, after (yet again) having been humiliated in the

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rain by a stranger she tried to pick up, she seems resigned to the fact that she is chronically single. But Carrie is played by an actress in a television series called *Sex and the City* who transparently is playing an actress acting the part of Carrie, who writes a column called "Sex and the City," which in the course of the series becomes a movie called *Sex and the City*, which is about a columnist named Carrie who writes a column called "Sex and the City," which becomes a movie, and on and on.

In other words, Carrie is really dating the idea of New York purveyed by *Sex and the City*; she is really dating her television. And it is beyond significant that this relationship—between a person and an appliance that projects the illusion of other people without exacting from the ego a price for being with other people—seems to be the only relationship in which this wildly popular series' creators, who have fashioned the show in their own image, actually believe. ■

The Bookist

By INGRID D. ROWLAND

Baudolino
by Umberto Eco
translated by William Weaver

(Harcourt, 522 pp., $27)

IN 1508, THE Tuscan painter Giovanni Bazzi, known as "Il Sodoma," frescoed a cloister in the Benedictine abbey of Monteoliveto Maggiore with scenes from the life of Saint Benedict. He peopled his paintings with visions of Benedict as a pretty blond youth of modest dress and well-turned limbs, his cupid's-bow mouth set in pious resistance to the blandishments of what the abbey's English-language postcards call "tempting courtesans." In the midst of this painted chronicle of the medieval saint's manifold trials and triumphs, a strange apparition stares out at the viewer, a young brown-haired man in an outrageous hat whose long, irregular nose and full lips are as pointedly individual as the saintly Benedict's features are blandly generic. The figure's colorfully striped clothing, garish hose, and white gloves present nearly as outlandish a picture as the small menagerie at his feet, dominated by two bounding badgers. It is a portrait of Sodoma himself, and although it shows a man whose nickname indicates how far his own life deviated from that of the good Benedict, it steals the show.

As a novelist, Umberto Eco is rather like Sodoma painting the life of Saint Benedict. His invented characters never command anywhere near the same attention for themselves as the author himself. In the case of his first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, the real subject was clearly Eco's own love affair with books, and its real protagonist was a library. That library's final immolation at the novel's end was an event whose tragedy Eco conveyed with genuine feeling; in his description of its burnt and shredded pages scattering in the wind, he laid bare the vulnerability of all writing, and hence of all communication. Surely it was the skill with which he captured the sheer precariousness of all things human that made the book an enormous popular success.

The Name of the Rose was a novel of plot rather than character, an intricate murder mystery set in a medieval monastery whose two protagonists, Friar William of Baskerville and Adso the novice, took their names and their general personality outlines from Sherlock Holmes and the faithful Watson; like Watson, Adso becomes the bewildered narrator of events beyond his small, loyal grasp. Eco's chief villain, Friar Jorge, the blind librarian, was an equally recognizable avatar of Jorge Luis Borges, whose enigmatic short stories suggested more than a few of the details of plot and the setting for the novel. The book was riddled with signifiers. Its opening sentence, "It was a beautiful morning in November," paid homage to Snoopy's doghouse mantra in the comic strip *Peanuts*, "It was a dark and stormy night...." In an earlier book called *How to Write a Master's Thesis*, Eco had assured students that making a compilation of already known information was in itself an act of originality. His novel showed him taking himself at his own word.

But Eco's own magpie borrowing had a purpose other than comforting the souls of nervous students. In 1980, when *The Name of the Rose* became a surprise best-seller in Italy, creating this kind of self-conscious patchwork was an exercise in "bricolage" or "intertextuality," and it was fortified with reams of ponderous French critical theory that seemed at the time, to borrow a phrase from e. e. cummings, "to lead something into somewhere." The more disparate the shiny objects gathered in the bricoleur's magpie nest, the more glittering the bricolage was adjudged by those who played the game. Eco's own nest in *The Name of the Rose* expanded the form to gargantuan proportions, ranging the tinsel of popular culture alongside the gold standard of Holy Scripture.

WHAT MADE *The Name of the Rose* seem like a special event, however, was not its display of erudition, but its simple, infectious passion for books, for reading and writing, and its sense of genuine experimentation. In creating the novel's peculiar literary hybrid, Eco, a forty-eight-year-old professor of semiotics at the University of Bologna, had taken a tremendous risk with his academic reputation by flouting the etiquette of academic writing, and with a surprisingly vast international public the gamble worked.

A veteran teacher, Eco also seemed to have written *The Name of the Rose* as a test of fiction's capacity to communicate factual knowledge as effectively as expository prose. As if to prove the point, his essay "Lector in Fabula," written at about the same time as his novel, rehearsed the book's analogy between reading a text and navigating a labyrinth, but with dry, dense precision and no perceptible sense of mystery whatever. (Of course Borges had made the point and drawn the analogy long before in a marvelously terse short story called "The Library of Babel.") At the same time, Eco, like many Italian intellectuals, wrote a column in *L'Espresso*, one of the national weeklies; here he appeared, bear-like and avuncular, as a protagonist in his own right, voluble, funny, and voraciously interested in the world around him. Like Sodoma at Monteoliveto Maggiore, he continued to be his own most compelling character.

In 1988 there followed *Foucault's Pendulum*, which met the fate so often

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reserved for second novels. Despite the fact that some aspects of the new book's intricate plot clearly responded to criticisms of *The Name of the Rose*, a general consensus held that it was an altogether less successful performance. (William Weaver's translation probably fared better in the United States than Eco's original did in Italy.) One of these criticisms involved Eco's portrayal of women. Set in a medieval monastery, *The Name of the Rose* had paid only minimal attention to that half of humanity. Its single erotic scene involves the novice monk Adso discovering sex with the help of a filthy, illiterate scullery maid on the floor of the monastery kitchen. Adso describes the incident by stringing together verses from the Bible, particularly the spectacularly sexy Song of Songs. The conceit is, in its way, masterful; Eco reveals the young man's sexual repression along with its Christian source. He also solves, neatly, the perennial problem of writing persuasively about the more ineffable realms of eros by borrowing from a proven source. Thus the poor wench, drawn in words as the Rose of Sharon, becomes Adso's Dulcinea.

Later she re-appears, accused of witchcraft, for which she is tried and convicted by the oleaginous Dominican Inquisitor Bernard Gui and burned at the stake. (The movie version of *The Name of the Rose* saved her and instead skewered F. Murray Abraham's Bernard on a spiked wheel—one of the film's most delicious moments.) Since the only other woman in much evidence throughout *The Name of the Rose* was the Virgin Mary, Eco's women presented a triad—Madonna/sex object/witch—that fit comfortably enough within a plot situated in the Middle Ages, but lost him some ground with the female reading public. Meanwhile, the plot's real action revolves more significantly around books, words, secrecy, discovery, and the legitimacy of laughter.

Not so *Foucault's Pendulum*. It takes place in its writer's own time, the late 1980s, when Italian feminists had been bombing porno movie houses for years, and forced at least one Roman auditorium back into what has never more aptly been called "legitimate" theater. Eco obviously sensed the need for a corrective to the manly world of *The Name of the Rose*. Enter Amparo, as Latin American as Che Guevara, with a Jane Fonda frizz of permed hair except that her curls are mulatto-black. She is the Third World Woman. Amparo's jeans wrap tight around her long, long legs; she herself is a pinball wizard whose special move involves nudging the Bally table with her mons veneris. For a middle-aged Italian male reader of self-styled liberal inclinations, her entrance upon the scene may have conveyed some of the sexy cosmopolitanism that the girlie scenes in a James Bond movie suggest, with the added frisson supplied by taking up with a woman whose skin is chocolate brown.

Umberto Eco by David Cowles for The New Republic

But Amparo's apotheosis in the book comes on a trip back to her native Brazil, where a brush with native religion suddenly reveals her in all her essential animality. She goes into a rabid religious trance. All the Marxist awareness in the world, once catalyzed by a little candomblé, cannot keep her in her rapture from turning into a she-beast as feral as the illiterate scullery maid in *The Name of the Rose*. Amparo, in sum, is tried and convicted as a witch in the pages of *Foucault's Pendulum* no less emphatically than the fourteenth-century scullery maid is tried and convicted of witchcraft in Eco's earlier novel—but this time the Grand Inquisitor is not the sinister Dominican Bernard Gui, it is Umberto Eco himself.

By 1988, other inquisitions were also running at full force. The title *Foucault's Pendulum* referred admiringly not only to a nineteenth-century scientific apparatus, but also to a French thinker who was then still alive and perpetrating a mighty work of post-structuralism on the campuses of the Western world. The basic point of Eco's long novel was no longer to prove—as it was in *The Name of the Rose*—that fiction could be as effective a means of communication as of narrative; the meteoric course of his own career had already decided that question in the affirmative. Instead, the pervasive influence of the non-pendular Foucault and his acolytes urged upon Eco's new book a new ambition: to show an unenlightened world that the very construction of reality was itself a fiction.

To this end, and in its general mood of post-structuralist hipness, *Foucault's Pendulum* also pressed a new technological instrument into service: the personal computer, with a simultaneous nod to the independent-minded computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In Eco's characteristic fashion, the novel also paid homage to several other complicated subjects, including conspiracy theories, the Holy Grail, and the Jewish mystical tradition known as Kabbalah. Indeed, the epigraph to the first page of the book boasted, untranslated, a section of the great thirteenth-century Kabbalistic text known as the *Zohar*, "The Book of Light." Perhaps the epigraph's lack

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of a translation was meant to show the mystic opacity of a text that most of Eco's readers could not be expected to decipher. Mostly, however, it looked like showing off, a none-too-subtle (and not entirely convincing) suggestion that Eco was himself deeply versed in the hermetic Aramaic of the medieval Jewish mystics.

The last epigraph in *Foucault's Pendulum*, obsessed as it is with magic and the occult, cites Giordano Bruno, the southern Italian philosopher who was burned at the stake in 1600 for heresy (and resurrected in the 1960s as a Renaissance magus by the English scholar Frances Yates). Bruno hated academic showoffs. He called them *asini pedanti*, or "pedantasses," and he sent them up at every opportunity in a torrent of Neapolitan invective. Like Eco, he spent his life trying to make the public at large understand intricate thought; but unlike Eco, he tried to communicate his philosophy by such unlikely media as a riotously obscene play called *The Candlemaker*, and epic quantities of Latin verse, and a dialogue laced with seventy sonnets called, appropriately for such an enterprise, *The Heroic Frenzies*. A preening epigraph in an academic novel is the last place that Giordano Bruno would ever have wanted to be imprisoned, and it is a pity that the fiery little southern Italian cannot train his stinging pen on the Piedmontese bear who has subjected him to such torture by bricolage.

YET THE REAL problem with *Foucault's Pendulum* as a novel about the construction of reality was, in fact, structural. Every aspect of the book, from the trumpeting pride embodied in its eclectic epigraphs to its horror story of a plot (the conspiracy theory that becomes reality), involved the author's detachment from his characters, a trio of ne'er-do-well computer geeks whose ultimate destiny is to succumb to the dark designs of Them, the conspirators whose vast plot is uncovered—or invented: get it?—by the protagonists. Unfortunately for the narrative's resolution, the identity of Them cannot be revealed, because the very point of the novel is that They are . . . constructed. And so the novel revolves around a hollow, if theoretically fashionable, center. Stephen King can pull off this sort of trick because his intervening prose makes no great demands on his readers, but by the time *Foucault's Pendulum* comes to its conclusion Eco has subjected his readers to long lessons on Kabbalah, the Knights Templar, and computer information trees. Will they really be happy to learn that it was all a conceit?

In its most unkindest cut of all, however, the novel exposed, by repetition, similar weaknesses in *The Name of the Rose*, from the gratuitous displays of erudition to the pallid characters to those characters' adolescent human relations to the besetting academic sin of going on way too long. When Eco came in for a drubbing the second time around, he deserved it. The most telling line in the whole novel comes in its putative preface (actually written by the narrator), in which the narrator, then a callow youth, begs his father to buy a magazine with the plea that the magazine is educational. "The purpose of magazines," intones the father, "is to sell magazines." How coy! How knowing! How postmodern! Giordano Bruno once met this variety of bad faith by the following sonnet (at the beginning of his *Ash Wednesday Supper* of 1584):

> If you've been worried in a cynic's bite
> You brought it on yourself, you barbarous cur
> In showing me your weaponry you err
> Unless you're careful not to rouse my spite.
> The frontal charge you made was hardly right;
> I'll shred your hide and pull out all your fur,
> And if no greater damage should occur
> A diamond's where you've sought your taunts to write.
> Don't rob a hive of honey in the nude
> Don't bite unless you know it's stone or bread
> Don't scatter thorns unless you're wearing shoes
> On spiderwebs a fly should not intrude
> A rat that follows frogs is good as dead.
> Hens and their brood all foxes should refuse
> And trust the Gospel verse
> That tells you, kind and terse:
> For him who sows a field with errors and lies
> A harvest of regret will be the prize.

ECO'S THIRD NOVEL, *The Island of the Day Before*, apparently revolves around a character based on the seventeenth-century German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, whose own foray into didactic fiction, *The Ecstatic Heavenly Journey*, which appeared in 1656, is a witty masterpiece. Well-endowed with ego himself, Kircher wisely acts as his own protagonist, playing off an acid-tongued guardian angel and a runny-nosed water sprite who taunt him mercilessly for his sluggish intellect and archaic ways of thinking. In harmony with the chastened 1990s, the tone of *The Island of the Day Before* is conspicuously lighter than the portentous thunderings of *Foucault's Pendulum*; Eco had traded in a ponderous post-structuralist lesson plan for a more straightforward plunge into fantasy. But the passion that animated *The Name of the Rose* is still missing, because the airy realms of intertextuality are thin stuff in comparison with that first novel's sheer tactile joy in books. Meanwhile, like many of Eco's pillaged authors, from the Bible to Borges, Athanasius Kircher has continued to speak perfectly well for himself. He has no need of postmodernism.

And here is *Baudolino*, Eco's fourth work of fiction. It is a picaresque novel set in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that pays its respects to medieval chronicle and to Woody Allen's *Zelig*. The original *pícaros* made their roguish way through the social and religious labyrinths of sixteenth-century Spain, where their Most Catholic Majesties the King and Queen claimed to have converted or expelled every Jew in the country, seconded by the unstinting efforts of the Spanish Inquisition. Jewish ancestry stands at the heart of many a literary *pícaro*'s career, from the seventeenth-century novels of Francisco de Quevedo Villegas to the figure of Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and this inescapable background of religious persecution makes theirs a supremely cruel world, in which they maneuver through violence, privation, and rigid social hierarchies with a survivor's desperation.

Cervantes's Don Quixote, as an eccentric aristocrat, was never a typical *pícaro*; and equally atypical was Cervantes's ability to make his hero at once sublime and ridiculous. Yet once Don Quixote had been invented he opened the picaresque to its full range of expressive possibility. (The musical *Man of La Mancha* captured Cervantes's range of characterization, from Don Quixote's foolish delusion and its occasional inadvertent cruelty to his tragic transcendence.) But the aspiring picaresque protagonist of *Baudolino* could no sooner wear a barber's basin on his head and call it the Golden Helmet of Mambrino than he could sing "The Impossible Dream": those are both acts that require a kind of unabashed sincerity, and a depth of individuality, that no Eco character has ever been substantial enough to muster.

Besides, musical comedy is not the kind of popular culture that the hip would ever deign to put into their lofty works of bricolage. It is too, well, popular. For all their professions of cultural egalitarianism, this caste of bricolating Brahmins includes some of the biggest snobs on the planet.

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To wit: Baudolino has been in on every major event, factual and fictional, from the Twelfth-Century Renaissance to the Fourth Crusade of 1204, including the search for the Holy Grail, the embassy to Prester John, and the Three Princes of Serendip. We meet him in the blazing ruins of Constantinople, in the middle of its sack by Crusaders, and we listen, through the well-tended ears of the Byzantine courtier and chronicler Niketas Choniates (a historical person), to the flashback of his life, most of it spent in service to the peripatetic king Frederick Barbarossa. Like the gilded Florentine youth who sit out the ravages of the Black Death to tell the tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Niketas and Baudolino remain strangely untouched by the carnage around them as they converse about Baudolino's life and times. It may be useful to remember that the novel was first published in Italy in 2000, when no one suspected that the southern waterfront of Manhattan would shortly come to resemble the book's description of the palaces along the Golden Horn going up in smoke. The implicit contrast between the refined civilization of Byzantium and the barbarity of the Crusaders who willfully put it to the torch is as forceful now as ever: the destruction of Constantinople in *Baudolino*, like the destruction of the library in *The Name of the Rose*, threatens to slay civility itself, and what power Eco commanded in his first novel he owed to his passion for every fragile thing that such a library represented. But a *pícaro*, in a setting as tragic as the sack of Constantinople, may simply be out of his depth. There are situations, in literature as well as in life, that call for a hero.

BAUDOLINO OWES MORE to Woody Allen than to Sophocles. Zelig-like, he has been everywhere that matters in his own time; and if, unlike Zelig, he also intervenes meaningfully in that history, it is not enough to make of him a hero. Instead he writes some of the important documents of the Middle Ages in order to prove that history, like reality, is constructed. (Perhaps a burning city is not the setting in which to make this contention stick.) Baudolino also witnesses the foundation of Alessandria, Umberto Eco's hometown, and writes one of the medieval texts that will "eventually" be pillaged by Alessandria's favorite son for bricolage in *The Name of the Rose*. What could be more clever?

Here is one humble suggestion: a novel by Italy's current favorite writer, the septuagenarian Sicilian writer Andrea Camilleri, whose first mystery story, *The Form of Water*, has just appeared in English. Camilleri's quicksilver facility with the nuances of language and his extraordinary sense of humor make Eco's books look mechanical and labored. At the same time, this veteran screenwriter performs his miracles of mimicry with an indulgent smile for the characters who speak and write at his command, from the bed-wetting German boy who dominates the opening scene of his own favorite novel, *Il Birraio di Preston*, or *The Bartender of Preston*, to Zosimo, the peasant prodigy who becomes, briefly, *Il Re di Girgenti*, or *The King of Girgenti*. Camilleri writes to entertain rather than to "sell magazines," and this professional commitment to his readers shows in every well-oiled move of his intricate plots and in every nuance of his characters, whose stock mannerisms act rather like the masks that picked out the characters in an ancient comedy. Camilleri can evoke the stark landscapes of his native southern Sicily without necessarily placing himself within them; indeed, his loyalty to his invented characters has become so strong that it has compelled him to tailor stories around supporting figures such as the stolid, earnest policeman Catenella—who ritually summons his boss, the hard-boiled Commissioner Montalbano, *pirsonalmente di pirsuna*, "personally in person"—or Montalbano's competent, sensitive lieutenant Mimi Augello. What Camilleri's readers usually remark about him is how hungry they get when reading his books, which are punctuated by ravishing descriptions of food, usually fish, cooked *come Dio comanda*, "as God commands it."

Put alongside this master storyteller, Umberto Eco reads like merely an academic novelist, a terrain that he has worked long and hard to conquer. But this conquest is a huge affair of vanity. And self-obsession's most charming face remains that of Sodoma. ■

The Mask of Decency

By OMER BARTOV

Speer: The Final Verdict
by Joachim Fest
translated by
Ewald Osers and Alexandra Dring

(Harcourt, 432 pp., $30)

IN THE POPULAR imagination, Nazi Germany evokes images of thick-necked bullies roughing up Jews on the streets of Berlin and Vienna; mass executions in desolate landscapes; immaculately dressed SS-men conducting selections on the ramps of Auschwitz; tough soldiers fighting desperately against overwhelming enemy onslaughts; mountains of corpses in liberated concentration camps; flattened cities stretching for miles from half-ruined cathedrals. Directing this fantastic plunge into the abyss are the figures of Adolf Hitler, gesticulating madly and screaming hoarsely in a guttural Austrian German to the intoxicated masses; Josef Goebbels, his crippled propaganda wizard, "cleansing" German culture of the Jews; Hermann Göring, abandoning his Luftwaffe to loot the art treasures of an entire continent as he eats and drugs himself into a stupor; Heinrich Himmler, the pedantic chicken farmer, scheming the racial purification of Europe; and Reinhard Heydrich, the sinister organizer of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question."

Albert Speer does not fit easily into this gang. Yet at a certain point in his career he was the most powerful man in Nazi Germany after Hitler. He was even considered to be Hitler's potential successor. Moreover, Speer was the sole figure in the top echelon of the Third Reich's hierarchy who not only survived the Führer, but also lived to write immensely popular accounts of those years of infamy. He was widely celebrated for those accounts, in Germany and elsewhere, as the sane and rational

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and even penitent voice of a destructive and genocidal regime.

There is some truth to the common view, repeated by Joachim Fest in his new book, that Speer was the most enigmatic personality of the Third Reich's leadership. Tall and handsome, cultivated and aloof, he disdained those whom he described as Hitler's petit-bourgeois cronies; but throughout the twelve years of the Thousand-Year Reich he maintained an intimate, almost erotic relationship with the Führer, who reciprocated emotionally to an extent not reserved even for his mistress. In another sense, however, Speer was the perfect example of the technocratic genius who finds his calling by mobilizing all his energies in the service of an authority figure. Hitler facilitated Speer's career by giving him almost unlimited power, which Speer wielded with astonishing effectiveness. He may have been, as Fest argues, "a man of many abilities, but of no qualities," that is, a man who had to be pushed and motivated, perhaps even mesmerized, by some external force. He may have been capable of serving a variety of masters and a wide range of political and ideological convictions and goals (though one can hardly see Speer becoming a Communist). Perhaps, indeed, he was a "man of the future—pragmatic, ambitious, without convictions," although there is enough evidence to show that he was a patriot, a nationalist, an anti-Communist, and an anti-Semite.

In this respect, at least, the reason that Speer deserves attention is his utter normality, rather than the enigma that has been romantically attached to him. Given his comfortable background and excellent schooling, Speer might well have internalized the values that should have protected him from so closely aligning himself with one of the greatest mass murderers of all time—and yet none of the countervailing influences seem to have mattered. Not only did he serve Hitler with great energy, but he also loved him, to the extent that he was capable of such an emotion. Even after the collapse of the regime, and after spending twenty years imprisoned in Spandau, Speer could not liberate himself entirely from his love for his Führer, nor could he completely accept the fact that he had been a significant tool in the implementation of unprecedented evil.

From this perspective, Speer's life may be interpreted, as Fest would like us to believe, as a cautionary tale of how "fragile these precautions [of upbringing and education] are, and how the ground on which we stand is always threatened." Indeed, the Nazi years have deeply shaken our belief in progress, which had become so much a part of Western civilization since the Enlightenment; and what most deeply rattled this confidence was not so much Hitler, who "came from nowhere," but Speer and others of his ilk, without whom the Führer would have been unable to achieve his murderous objectives. And yet this is not the whole story. For Speer's life is also a manifestation of the particular fate and the specific nature of his generation in Germany, just as the version of his life that Fest has given us, his "final verdict" on Hitler's architect and minister, is very much in tune with the view of Nazism common among those who belong to Fest's own generation and hold similarly conservative views.

SPEER AND FEST knew each other quite well, and both were on good terms with Fest's publisher, Wolf Jobst Siedler. Shortly after his release from Spandau in 1966, Speer agreed to publish his memoirs of the Nazi period, subsequently titled *Inside the Third Reich*, with Siedler, who was the director of the Ullstein and Propyläen publishing houses. To help Speer edit the manuscript, which was based on notes that he had written during his twenty-year imprisonment, Siedler enlisted the help of Fest, a journalist and a historian who was engaged in writing a massive biography of Hitler (a project that Speer himself had contemplated but abandoned). It appears that Fest and Siedler, ambitious and gifted men in their early forties, greatly appealed to Speer, who had reached the pinnacle of his power under Hitler when he was about their age. Neither the publisher nor the historian seemed particularly troubled by the idea of working closely with a man who had been convicted by the Nuremberg Tribunal for being a senior member of the Nazi regime and had just been released from jail; they were evidently fascinated by Speer and expected to profit from their association with him.

Others might have had greater scruples about such a friendship, as can be gleaned from the recent memoirs of the literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki. Born into a Polish-Jewish family in 1920, educated in Germany, and deported back to Poland in 1938 (he survived the Holocaust, but both his parents were murdered), Reich-Ranicki finally returned to Germany in 1958. Recruited by Fest—who had just been appointed co-publisher of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*—to be head of the literary section of that prestigious conservative newspaper, Reich-Ranicki quickly became the "pope" of German letters. Fest, for his part, owed his reputation primarily to his massive biography of Hitler, published in 1973 by Siedler, who had published Speer's memoirs in 1969. To mark the occasion of Fest's new book, Reich-Ranicki and his wife were invited to a reception at Siedler's house. As he writes in *The Author of Himself*, they were in for a shock:

> A few people were talking animatedly with ... an impressive gentleman probably in his late sixties, who seemed to be at the center of the group. Our host was attending him with the utmost courtesy, if not respect. It appeared that Fest was not the guest of honor that evening, but the well-built, pleasant-looking gentleman.... This well-dressed gentleman was a criminal—one of the worst war criminals in the history of Germany ... I am talking of Albert Speer.... Was I rigid with horror? Did I shout at the mass murderer who stood there respectfully joking about his Führer, did I call him to order? No ... I kept silent, horrified. But I wondered what kind of person our host, the publisher and journalist Wolf Jobst Siedler, must be if he thought it possible to invite Albert Speer and us to the same gathering.... [And] what about Fest ...? Why had he not warned, or at least informed, me? I think I know the answer. It probably never occurred to him that I might—to put it mildly—have misgivings about shaking hands with one of the top Nazis or sitting at the same table with him.

Some years later, during the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s, Siedler published a little book by the historian Andreas Hillgruber, which insisted on the obligation of German historians to identify with the plight of the Wehrmacht soldiers who protected Germany from the Red Army's "orgy of revenge," and rejected out of hand the possibility that Germans might identify with the Jewish victims whose numbers kept mounting as long as the front held. At the same time Fest came out in defense of an even more notorious revisionist, the political scientist Ernst Nolte, who had caused a furor in German intellectual circles with the publication of an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1986 in which he argued that the originators of the genocide of the Jews were neither the Germans, nor the Nazis, nor Hitler, but the Bolsheviks, and that the Holocaust was merely a reaction to previous Communist crimes. (The latter argument had been made by the Nazis themselves.)

Ultimately, Reich-Ranicki felt compelled to break with Fest, who consistently refused to distance himself from Nolte's

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increasingly indefensible positions, which, by 1987, had boiled down to the declaration that the "Final Solution" had not been a German production at all but rather "the collective work of European fascism and anti-Semitism." What Reich-Ranicki sensed in the early 1970s about the circle of conservative intellectuals to which Fest belonged had by then become an established fact in German intellectual life. In 1998 Martin Walser, another well-known writer of Fest's generation, used the opportunity of a public lecture to express his impatience with the use of the Holocaust as a "moral cudgel" with which to beat the Germans.

FEST'S BIOGRAPHY OF Speer is consequently full of interesting insights and at the same time deeply repugnant, an exercise in blocking off the central question of the Nazi period and in obfuscating the specificity of its German context. For what is most troubling about Speer, obviously, is that he served a genocidal regime; and while it is true that neither anti-Semitism nor fascism was exclusively German, the genocide of the Jews certainly was. The question that needs to be answered, the only interesting question about Speer, is what made him serve a regime sworn to murder the Jews, and how did he get away with denying his knowledge of that genocide, and his complicity in it, until the end of his life.

Fest's book is not the only biography of Speer. A few years ago Gitta Sereny—well known for her portrait of Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka, in *Into that Darkness*—published a study called *Speer: His Battle with Truth*. It is in some ways the perfect foil against which Fest's book can be evaluated. Sereny and Fest have the same goal: they are striving to understand the mental make-up of a man who was apparently both the most reasonable and the least ideological figure among Hitler's satraps and at the same time contributed more than anyone else to prolonging the survival of the regime in its most destructive phase, while maintaining before and even after the final collapse an intimate relationship with the ultimate source of that evil. But they go about their investigations in a very different manner. Sereny's sprawling text is filled with details about Speer's childhood and youth, his relationships with his parents, his wife and children, his secretary, his most devoted friends. It seeks a psychological clarification of how a man of great talents was so emotionally hollow that his only true loyalty was to a psychotic murderer. Sereny spent many hours talking to Speer and seems to have established a kind of friendship with him. But while she reveals a great deal about him, she fails to crack the hard crust that had formed around him and must concede that her attempt to make him face the truth of his complicity failed. Her empathy for him is disturbing, and her suggestion that his actions must be traced to a lack of love in his childhood is unconvincing. As Fest rightly says, such psychological interpretations can explain either why one becomes a mass murderer or why one does not; they are too open-ended to explain anything.

Fest spends little time on psychology. Indeed, he is so focused on Speer's actions that he leaves a great deal unsaid. Speer's relationships with his wife and children, as well as with his devoted secretary Annemarie Kempf, get short shrift, although they do have something to tell us about the man, as well as about the beliefs, the loyalties, and the blindness of those who surrounded him. Fest's more focused and historically oriented book therefore ends up as yet another, though very different, apologia for Speer. By ignoring or dismissing the ample evidence of Speer's commitments and convictions, by taking him too often at face value, and by accepting his pleas of ignorance about actions that were impossible to ignore and his pleas of non-complicity in criminal policies that were clearly under his control, Fest lets Speer off the hook, and thereby manufactures an extenuation for his own link with a war criminal.

ALBERT SPEER WAS born in Mannheim in 1905, and was raised in a privileged and emotionally arid home. His father was a successful architect who professed liberal sympathies but manifested typical class prejudices, not least by strongly opposing his son's marriage to a woman of a slightly lower class. His socially ambitious mother joined the Nazi Party as early as 1931. Speer seems to have remained unaffected by the main events of the Weimar Republic, and even when he was at university, at a time when German students were becoming politically radicalized, he was more interested in the classics and in hiking. In 1925, Speer transferred from Munich University to the Technical University in Berlin, and shortly thereafter became his professor's assistant. Five years later he went to hear Hitler give a speech and was mesmerized. The following year he joined the Nazi Party.

Finding himself without serious employment, Speer eagerly took up several assignments to reconstruct buildings for the Nazis. Hitler's "seizure of power" was to change Speer's life, but the events that surrounded it passed him by. Thus he apparently either did not notice or paid no attention to the violence in the streets, the mass arrests of Communists, the harassment of Jews, the establishment of concentration camps, the destruction of the trade unions, and the abolition of parliamentary rule. Instead he became absorbed in the renovation of the chancellor's residence in Berlin, a decisive assignment that led to a meeting with Hitler that eventually culminated in an increasingly intimate relationship that lasted until Hitler's suicide in 1945, and in a certain sense continued until Speer's own death thirty-six years later.

From 1933 until 1942, Speer was Hitler's architect. But he was also much more: he served as the Führer's alter ego, as the man who effortlessly embodied everything that Hitler had always wanted to be, a suave, self-assured, gifted, and ambitious artist. At the core of the link between these two men was their self-perception as artists. Hitler, who had failed to get into art school in Vienna, had always thought of himself as an artist who had been thwarted from his ambitions by Jewish conspiracies and by his duty to lead the German *Volk* into a better future. Speer, whose bombastic plans for a new Berlin revealed his severe aesthetic limitations, felt that his eventual role as the Reich's minister of armaments was just a temporary diversion from his vocation. In fact, Hitler was a second-rate painter but a first-rate politician, while Speer was a mediocre architect but an extraordinary technocrat and organizer. The two men shared an ambition for which they had little talent and were immensely skilled in a role that they dismissed as a mere distraction.

There is little point in outlining Speer's architectural accomplishments before he launched his astonishing, if brief, political career. Most of his plans were never, or only partly, built. His one memorable achievement was the least concrete and the most ephemeral: the so-called cathedral of lights, in which Speer used 150 anti-aircraft searchlights pointed to the sky to create "light domes" over the Nuremberg rally in 1934. One of his most impressive constructions, the chancellery that he built for Hitler on the eve of the war, became the Führer's tomb in 1945 and the subsequent symbol of his nihilistic impulse. Speer's plan for Germania, a redesigned Berlin, was ludicrous in its dimensions and destructive in its total disregard for the capital's old buildings. Its only redeeming feature, if one can call it that, was that its model became a refuge for Hitler when he wished to escape from

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his political fantasies to an architectural dream world.

IT WAS WHEN he was thrust, either by chance or by design, into the role of Reich minister of armaments and ammunition in February 1942, following the death of his predecessor Fritz Todt in an unexplained aircraft crash, that Speer came into his own. But even before he took up the role with astonishing energy—despite the fact that he had already recognized that the war could probably no longer be won—Speer had learned to ignore or to remain indifferent to the mounting evidence of the regime's criminality. Fest makes no mention in his biography of the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935, which deprived German Jews of their citizenship and sanctioned their increasing marginalization and impoverishment. Nor did Speer pay much heed to this extraordinary event in which a state stripped its own citizens of their rights and condemned them to social death.

The index of *Inside the Third Reich* has references to the Nuremberg Party rallies and to the postwar tribunal there, but none whatsoever to the racial laws. Similarly, in early drafts of his memoirs Speer failed even to mention the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938. Only under pressure from Siedler and Fest did Speer relent and note that "what disturbed me at the time was the aspect of disorder ... charred beams, collapsed facades, burned-out walls.... The smashed panes of shop windows offended my sense of middle-class order ... I accepted what had happened rather indifferently." On that day, 270 synagogues were destroyed, 7,500 businesses were devastated, 190 Jews were murdered, hundreds committed suicide, and thousands were incarcerated in concentration camps. But Speer could recollect only fragments of those terrible events, and only under duress. The astounding selectivity of his memory was such that, as he wrote in his memoirs, "It has repeatedly surprised me, in later years, that scarcely any anti-Semitic remarks of Hitler's have remained in my memory.... Hitler's hatred for the Jews seemed to me so much a matter of course that I gave it no serious thought."

Such immensely revealing and damning comments by Speer do not concern Fest. Hitler, as we know from his so-called "table talk," spoke at great length about his hatred for the Jews precisely at those meetings with his intimate circle that Speer often attended. Yet Speer remembered neither the tirades nor the policies that were predicated on them. Fest also supplies a generous interpretation for an event in which Speer was hardly a bystander. Extending his bureau for the rebuilding of Berlin by a Central Department for Resettlement, Speer became preoccupied with ejecting the Jewish residents of the capital from their homes, so as to demolish them for the purpose of building Germania or to make them available for Aryan residents. Altogether some 75,000 Jews were resettled by Speer's new department. Most of them were eventually sent to ghettoes in the East, where they largely perished. Not only was Speer aware of these actions, but he even urged his underlings to get on with the business.

Fest notes Speer's assertion that "he never was, not even faintly, an anti-Semite," and he explains his actions by saying that "in Speer's world there was no motive whatsoever to be found. The state of total dependence into which he had placed himself transformed everything into administrative procedures, and for him the fate of the 75,000 people in whose life he tragically intervened boiled down to administrative guidelines for 'building policy measures.'" In fact, Speer was anything but an administrative automaton. When he believed that the fate of his own people, the Germans, was threatened, even by the Führer himself, he did all he could to save it and was quite willing to risk his own life for this goal. But the Jews did not figure into his compassion. For Speer they were dispensable, not only in war but even in implementing his urban plans. His feeling about the Jews was not as vehement and as murderous a sentiment as Hitler's; but one is hard put to call it anything but anti-Semitism.

As Sereny has already shown, Speer was raised in a family that, like many others of its kind in Germany of the period, had no time for Jews; and even after the war and the Holocaust, he professed views that had a distinctly anti-Semitic air of which he was, naturally enough, entirely unaware. Thus he wrote his daughter Hilde as late as 1953 that "as far as practicing anti-Semitism or even uttering anti-Semitic remarks, my conscience is entirely clear. I really had no aversion to [Jews], no more than the slight discomfort all of us sometimes feel when in contact with them." Still, Speer was conscious of the fact that his role in sending the Jews of Berlin to their death was not conducive to his attempts to clear his name throughout his post-1945 life. He was obviously grateful when his loyal friend Rudolf Wolters, who remained even more devoted to his memory of the "good old days" than Speer, deleted the incriminating references to these events from the chronicle he kept for Speer before the purged version was deposited in the Federal Archives. But when the original diary was handed over to the young German student Matthias Schmidt in 1979 by Wolters, who had by then become disenchanted with Speer (for being too critical of Hitler!), the truth came out. In a last stroke of good fortune, Speer died in 1981, only six months before Schmidt's book was published.

Unlike Speer, Fest does not consider Schmidt's revelation, which proved that Speer had lied throughout the postwar years about his role in the murder of the Jews, to be terribly important. Indeed, Fest's easy dismissal of this case, and his assertion that by the time Schmidt's book was published this was "no longer an issue of public interest," is exceedingly puzzling. After all, if Speer's entire postwar persona was built on a lie, and if the lie consisted of his alleged ignorance of Germany's policies of murder, can this be an issue of merely marginal interest to his biographer?

SUSPICION ABOUT THE death of Fritz Todt was triggered not only by the bewildering circumstances and the conflicting evidence that surrounded his plane crash, which occurred just as he was taking off from the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia. It was also related to the fact that Todt had been warning Hitler for some time that the war was lost. Hitler and Todt had a heated confrontation only hours before Todt's death. In these circumstances, Speer's nomination to the post was both surprising and a stroke of genius on Hitler's part. For while Speer had no background in industry and armaments, he was endowed with outstanding organizational abilities and a cool, calculating, and yet relentless urge for ever greater power and control. At the same time, with the exception of the very last weeks of the war, Speer was entirely loyal to Hitler. In the universe of intrigue that surrounded the Führer, Speer maintained a posture of absolute integrity toward his largely devoted underlings and toward Hitler himself.

For this reason, Speer accomplished what most observers in Germany and abroad considered a miracle. While the Reich was losing the war, and its cities, transportation hubs, and industries were targeted by massive Allied bombing raids, its production of armaments grew by leaps and bounds. In order to be able to increase production even as the front was devouring every available male in the Reich, Speer relied to a growing extent on foreign labor, mostly forcibly recruited in Eastern and Western Europe, some of it

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coming directly from concentration camps. His general plenipotentiary for labor, Fritz Sauckel, recruited millions of slave workers for Speer's war industry. It was thanks to Sauckel's brutal methods of recruitment that Speer was supplied with the men and women who created the "economic miracle" of 1942–1944, but it was Sauckel who was hanged after the war, while Speer was left to write the history of his accomplishments.

Speer always denied any knowledge of the conditions under which his slave laborers toiled and died. In early 1943, he made his only recorded visit to a concentration camp—Mauthausen—but the SS had been given sufficient warning to arrange the visit in a way that would shield the minister from the worst horrors of this notorious camp. But in December 1943 Speer visited the underground installations, called "Dora," where Wernher von Braun's V-2 rockets were being produced. This site was described to Speer by his own ministry's medical director as an inferno out of Dante. Confronted with the barbarous conditions under which thousands of men were kept in these caves and tunnels, Speer made some proposals for improvement. In fact, some 60,000 men were deported to Dora by the end of the war, and half of them perished there.

SPEER WANTED TO have it both ways. His accomplishments in arming the Wehrmacht were based on the brutal enslavement of millions of foreigners; but while he boasted of his achievements in the former, he denied any knowledge of or responsibility for the latter. At the Nuremberg Tribunal in 1945, Speer cleverly assumed a general responsibility for the crimes of the regime without conceding guilt for any specific crime. This stance made him stand out among the other defendants and may well have saved his life. But the truth is that Speer's entire career as minister was based on a massive crime against humanity, without which he would have been unable to keep the fighting soldiers in the field.

And this brings us to another paradox. Speer quickly came to realize, like Todt, that Germany could not possibly win the war after the terrible losses that it sustained in the winter of 1941–1942. And after the debacle of Stalingrad the following winter, defeat became an absolute certainty. Unlike Todt, however, Speer strove to produce ever more weapons—and thereby did more than anyone else in the Third Reich to perpetuate a war that was already lost. This led to the unnecessary deaths of millions of German soldiers and civilians and to the destruction of lives and property in lands occupied by the Wehrmacht, and, not least, facilitated the only victory that Nazi Germany could claim, namely, the almost complete annihilation of the Jewish population of Europe.

Just as Speer was rallying to the support of Hitler following the failed putsch attempt of July 1944, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were being gassed in Auschwitz at an unprecedented rate; and others, deemed sufficiently hardy, were sent to precisely those Dora tunnels in which Hitler's *Wunderwaffen* (wonder weapons) were being produced at a tremendous cost in human lives. Here, indeed, was the collapse of reason. Speer, whose primary gift was rational thinking and organizational skill even under the most trying circumstances, was ceaselessly working to delay an inevitable military collapse and thereby causing the ever-greater destruction of both Germany and its foes, real and imaginary.

It is against this background that Speer's one act of defiance against Hitler must be seen. In the final months and weeks of the war, Speer refused to carry out Hitler's "scorched earth" orders, which dictated the destruction of German facilities about to be overrun by the enemy. In this way he certainly saved Germany from even greater destruction, and from the threat of widespread famine and disease. In this instance Speer's patriotism superseded his loyalty to Hitler, and his undoubted courage in defying the Führer contrasted with the cowardice of other Nazi leaders who sought their own salvation by proceeding with the destruction of their people. Yet one must keep in mind that it was only thanks to Speer that Germany had been able to keep fighting for so long. Even the wretched *Panzerfaust* bazookas with which old men and teenagers were ordered to confront Soviet, American, and British armor were produced in vast amounts in Speer's factories. So Speer may have wanted to save his own people from total destruction, even against Hitler's orders; but considering his role in bringing about the "horror without end" that the war had become, and the means that he employed to keep the war going, one must conclude that Speer was directly responsible for the conditions that he tried to mitigate as the final catastrophe approached. But none of these issues greatly exercises Fest, who is impressed by Speer's patriotism.

WHAT MOST HAUNTED Speer after the war was the question of his role in, or knowledge of, the genocide of the Jews. And it is here that Fest's book is most perplexing, not least because it entirely ignores some of the findings that were included in Sereny's study. In January 1942, Speer, in his capacity as head of the *Baustab Speer*, or Speer Construction Staff, which was still under the general directorship of Todt, went to inspect his construction teams charged with repairing the transportation system in Ukraine. According to Fest, he was delayed by weather in the city of Dnepropetrovsk. Under the threat of advancing Soviet tanks, he finally managed to leave on February 7, heading directly to Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg, where he was to be nominated as minister following Todt's death the next day. But Sereny showed that, by the time of Speer's week-long stay in this large Ukrainian city, Dnepropetrovsk had already been declared by SS Gruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln "almost though not entirely *judenrein*."

Jeckeln arrived in the city with *Kommando 5* of his *Einsatzgruppe C* on October 4, 1941, directly from the murder of Kiev's 33,000 Jews at Babi Yar. Within two days Jeckeln's men had killed all the Jews who had failed to leave the city with the retreating Red Army, a total of 30,000 men, women, and children. "Jew hunts" continued well into March 1942. Did Speer hear nothing of these murders when he arrived in the city in January? Could he

Travelers

In fact we've packed almost
everything. Cold fright
at the precipice. The long
thought of dying.
Windows
of the bus are cracked.
Sun film peels from
the two-way mirror.
We notice
what we see notices us.
A mountain, an unmade bed
of tar stare back. An ostrich buries
its familiar head.
At the town
gates no one waits. No one meets
us in the square. We speak
an unknown tongue.
In the hostel
we unpack what we forgot.
Roll of the dice. Aftermath.
All the local shops closed at six.

Robert Bense

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have avoided any knowledge of all other mass murders in the Ukraine despite his frequent subsequent trips there? This question, rightly raised by Sereny, does not seem even to have occurred to Fest. Speer, too, was surprised to be asked this question by Sereny decades later, even though there was no longer any way to deny that Ukraine had been the site of mass murders between 1942 and 1944. Indeed, Speer found it quite reasonable to assert that the news of these actions never reached him, and he appears never to have questioned himself about these mass killings throughout the intervening years.

On October 6, 1943, Speer attended a conference to which top Party officials were invited, along with Alfred Rosenberg, Josef Goebbels, and Heinrich Himmler. During the morning session, Speer delivered a fiery speech demanding that the Gauleiters, the Party's regional chiefs, dedicate themselves with much greater energy to the war effort. His implied threat that those who did not comply could expect actions against them by the SS caused a storm of protest. After lunch, Himmler addressed the meeting. He used the opportunity to speak with the utmost clarity and directness about the genocide of the Jews. His intention was most probably to make these Party chiefs complicit in the crime, and thereby to spur them on in their efforts to mobilize German society for the continuing struggle, knowing now full well that defeat would spell punishment for these horrific deeds. Himmler explained the need to kill women and children, so as not "to allow the avengers" of genocide "in the shape of their children to grow up with our sons and grandsons." He claimed that the "difficult task" of mass murder "was carried out without—as I believe I am able to say—our men and our leaders suffering injury to spirit and soul." And he concluded that "the Jewish question in the countries occupied by us will be settled by the end of this year."

The historian Erich Goldhagen pointed out in an article in 1971 that Speer was present at Himmler's speech. Indeed, Himmler addressed Speer directly, saying that the minister was not responsible for the fact that the SS was prevented from seizing the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto by the argument that they were needed for the war economy. Goldhagen's article compelled Speer to seek an alibi, in the form of several witnesses who testified that he left Posen at noon on his way to Hitler's headquarters, allegedly to prepare the Führer for the complaints of the Gauleiters about his earlier threats in advance of the scheduled arrival of the Party chiefs the next day. Fest accepts this explanation, although he concedes that Speer probably heard about the contents of Himmler's speech shortly thereafter. Speer, for his part, made no mention in his memoirs of that crucial speech by Himmler, which was nothing less than the first public admission of the regime's genocidal policy to a circle of Party bosses hitherto not officially in the know.

But the evidence of Speer's absence is flimsy. As Sereny showed, Speer's claims are unconvincing. He argued that he could not have flown to Rastenburg after Himmler's speech because night landings were not allowed at the Führer's headquarters; but Hitler's own pilot told Sereny that night landings certainly were permitted. Speer claimed to have met Hitler that evening, but the Führer's appointment calendar shows him meeting his minister only the following evening. In his memoirs Speer wrote that "the evening after this meeting many of the Gauleiters drank so heavily that they needed help to get to the special train taking them to the Führer's headquarters that night," which would indicate that he was indeed still in Posen, though the reason for the heavy drinking was probably Himmler's speech rather than his own. Speer's argument that he confused this meeting with another one that took place a year later is utterly unconvincing, not least because unlike his Posen lecture, his speech of August 1944 to the Gauleiters was, according to Goebbels, enthusiastically received. As for the two witnesses who claimed that Speer had left Posen before Himmler spoke, Sereny found evidence to suggest that one of them, Walter Rohland, bowed to insistent pressure from Speer following the Goldhagen article, and the second, Harry Siegmund, told her directly in 1986 that when he did not volunteer an affidavit concerning Speer's absence from Himmler's speech, "Speer pursued me with I don't know how many phone calls, so I finally gave him what he wanted."

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to establish with perfect certainty whether Speer was present at Himmler's speech. What matters, rather, is the entire trajectory of his career in the Third Reich. When Speer joined the Nazi Party, he knew that it was dedicated to anti-Semitism; when he was enthusiastically organizing the Party's annual rallies in Nuremberg, he could not have avoided hearing about the racial laws announced there in 1935; when he was busily refurbishing official buildings in Berlin, he could not have missed the widespread destruction caused by the November 1938 pogrom. After the war broke out, Speer was directly involved in the expulsion and the subsequent deportation of the Jews of Berlin to ghettos and camps in the East. In charge of reconstruction of transport in Ukraine, he could not have entirely avoided knowledge of the mass killings perpetrated there by the *Einsatzgruppen*. As minister of armaments, he had precise figures of the millions of forced and slave laborers working for the German war industry, and he could not have remained ignorant of the atrocious conditions in which they lived and died. As a top Nazi official, he was probably present at—or at least he subsequently heard about—Himmler's admission of the Reich's policy of genocide. As one of Hitler's intimates, he was subjected to hundreds of the Führer's anti-Semitic rants and heard him talking explicitly about the need to exterminate the Jews.

What is extraordinary about all this is not that Speer did not know, but that he managed to get away with this obviously absurd assertion of ignorance for so long, while somehow giving the impression that he was a morally sensitive man. And this is what I find so troubling in Fest's portrayal of the man. Clearly Speer's greatest artistic creation was his own biography. The success of this creation tells us something about postwar German society, which made Speer into a kind of folk hero: the only "decent" member of Hitler's circle, the elegant, clean-cut, and thoughtful non-Nazi who stood up to the Führer and saved the Germans from Hitler's final wrath. Fest, of course, played a major role in Speer's last and possibly most successful architectural venture. He edited his books, supplied him with the social and intellectual respectability of associating with the new conservative elites of postwar Germany, and now, in an effort to clean up both his own and Speer's record, provides us with this "final verdict."

But in history there is never a final verdict. Fest's biography of Hitler, which devoted a total of five out of 764 pages (in English translation) to the genocide of the Jews and reflected a kind of stunned admiration for what Fest called the Führer's "historical greatness," has been superseded by Ian Kershaw's monumental study. So, too, we may expect that Speer will receive a more impartial and critical treatment. But for now, while it is sad enough that so many historians of the twentieth century make their reputations by writing about the worst criminals in the annals of humanity, it is especially terrifying when some of them actually express sympathy for such despicable people. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Ink Blot

NEXT WEEK, THE U.S. CONference of Catholic Bishops will meet in Washington to finalize its policies on child abuse. Its president, Bishop Wilton Gregory, will again have his work cut out for him, fending off those who have tried to hijack the crisis for their own ideological agendas. The crazy left wants to overturn celibacy. The crazy right intends a witch-hunt of gay priests. And now, neoconservative Catholics are mounting a hijack attempt of their own.

THE NEOCONS HAVE A SIMPLE ANSWER to the Church's current woes: The problem is a "culture of dissent" within the Church. In the October issue of the neocon Catholic journal *Crisis,* editor Deal Hudson penned an article explaining, "A call for dialogue on settled issues is itself a symptom of dissent. What's needed now isn't dialogue but teaching." Fellow neocon George Weigel, author of what he describes as the "authoritative" biography of Pope John Paul II, agrees. According to his new book, *The Courage to Be Catholic,* the 1960s turned the world upside down, both inside and outside the Church: sexual roles were questioned, homosexuals started coming out of the closet, the Second Vatican Council took away Latin. By the 1970s, there was reform in seminaries, confusion about priestly roles, and opposition to the 1968 encyclical banning birth control. These developments, argues Weigel, are the true causes of both the sexual predation by priests and the bishops' unwillingness to confront it. Weigel is especially hard on post-Vatican II seminaries where, he asserts, "men thus learned ... to pay lip service to teachings they did not believe and had no intention of promoting in their ministries." The Church today needs greater fidelity to its own teachings, as seen, of course, through the theological prisms of Weigel.

NO CATHOLIC WOULD EVER ARGUE that the Church cannot benefit from greater fidelity. But Weigel's diagnosis is wrong. Simply consider the age of the most notorious priest-pedophiles: Convicted molester John Geoghan was ordained in 1962, the year Vatican II began; indicted molester Paul Shanley was ordained in 1960. In fact, the molestation of altar boys by priests is probably as old as the Church. The difference is that now we are learning to listen to the victims. Surely, that is a form of fidelity, too. If Weigel does not see this, it is perhaps because his book does not spend much time discussing the victims of abuse at all. He instead spills a lot of ink discussing the consequences of molestation for the priest, his image, and his relationship to the Church. "A priest who sexually abuses children has grossly disfigured himself as a living re-presentation of the Christ who asked that the little children be brought to him," Weigel writes. After the heart-wrenching testimonies of abuse survivors at the bishops' meeting in Dallas last June, Weigel is one of the few prominent Catholics who still does not understand that it is the damage to the child—not the damage to the image of the priesthood—that cries out to heaven for justice.

SEEING THIS CRISIS IN TERMS OF SINS of the flesh is indicative of the neoconservative approach. Weigel talks about the need for every Catholic to be more faithful. But he makes it sound so easy, nothing more complicated than keeping our pants zipped. This kind of "can-do" spirituality is so American—and so heretical. Neocons are prone to Pelagianism, the fifth-century heresy that promoted the belief that we could earn our way into heaven. But pride, not lust, is the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. The betrayal of trust, which is a sin of the spirit, is what is so revolting about clerical sexual abuse—much more so than the sex itself. And the arrogance of the bishops, another sin of the spirit, is what has turned this problem into a crisis.

BUT FOR WEIGEL, AND HIS FELLOW neocons, it's always about the sex. He writes, "The Catholic sexual ethic is an affirmation of the gift of sexuality, insisting that sex reduced to another contact sport is dehumanized sex." Are these really the only two options? Are there not millions of non-Catholics who enjoy healthy, humanized sexual relationships? Weigel writes dismissively of those Catholics who struggle with the Church's sexual teachings (as if any human struggle should ever be dismissed), calling them the school of "Catholic Lite." With Weigel, it is always all or nothing: Either you are in full communion with the Church as he understands it, or you are a part of the "culture of dissent."

OR ALMOST ALWAYS. AFTER ALL, Weigel first came to public notice in the 1980s, when he dissented from the American bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace issues, as well as their letter on economic issues. To be sure, there is a difference between disagreeing with a document from the bishops' conference and with a papal document. Indeed, those bishops' letters acknowledged that the principles they enunciated enjoyed greater moral certitude than did the policy prescriptions the bishops derived from them. Still, the dirty little secret is that, for all of their protestations against the "culture of dissent," Weigel and his neocon friends have openly dissented from their ecclesiastical superiors when it has suited them. Some Catholics ignore the teaching on condoms, others ignore the teaching on the rights of labor. Unless someone denies the divinity of Christ, I am not prepared to throw him or her out of the Church.

WEIGEL'S AVERSION TO DEBATE MAY stem from his unusual access to the authorities in Rome. But surely this aversion is an unhappy one for the Church. In a recent interview in *The Tablet,* Vatican Cardinal Walter Kasper had this to say about the tradition of debate within the Church during Vatican II: "The Church was seen in a very positive way, as one bishop debated against another and one cardinal against another. It did not damage the Church, it helped it! It gave good expression to a living Church! ... Yes, I think we miss it." Indeed we do. The neocon impulse to believe that all major issues are settled, that the triumph of democratic capitalism is synonymous with the second coming, that their way is the only way—these impulses must be resisted. Catholicism's most fundamental historical blessing has been to defy such reductionisms. It is telling that almost every page of Weigel's new tome could have been written whether or not the pedophilia crisis had ever taken place.

THIS SCANDAL IS REALLY ABOUT THE ubiquitousness of human sinfulness. First and foremost, it should induce great humility in all Catholics. But humility is not Weigel's forte; he has all the answers. A few months ago, I asked a Vatican diplomat what he thought of Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II, and he replied, "At the end, one felt compelled to ask, 'Who is that man in white standing next to George Weigel?'" That man in white should listen to others if he wants to understand the real meaning of the crisis roiling his Church.

MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

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The American Literacy Tragedy

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At science and math, American students trail those in other advanced democracies. The longer students are in school, the worse things get. Among fourth graders, U.S. students rank high on the International Test of Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Despite this head start, by eighth grade, American adolescents have slipped to the midpoint on the TIMSS, and, by age seventeen, their scores trail all but those in a few developing countries.

Perhaps this is "just" math and science, something American schools have never been good at. Besides, apologists say, Asian students (who score at the top on the TIMSS) are inexplicable math and science geniuses.

Yet low performance is not limited to these more challenging subjects. **Americans barely reach the international literacy average set by advanced democracies**, according to a report issued by the Educational Testing Service after looking at the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Unlike the math and science surveys, the IALS was given to a cross section of adults aged 16 to 65. Despite the high expenditures on education in the United States—and the large numbers of students enrolled in colleges and universities—the United States ranked 12th on the test.

The United States is living on its past. Among the oldest group in the study (those aged 56–65), U.S. prose skills rose to second place. For those attending school in the 1950s, SAT scores reached an all-time high.

As the years go by, the United States slips down the list. Americans educated in the sixties captured a Bronze Medal in literacy, those schooled in the seventies got 5th place in the race. But those schooled in the nineties ranked 14th.

Have Americans sacrificed quality for equity? One could hope for such egalitarian bliss; unfortunately, the opposite is true. Among the twenty highest-income countries participating in the test, the United States wins the inequality Gold Medal.

Not true for the oldest group, however. For those educated in the fifties, the United States not only managed to achieve the second-highest literacy scores but, on the inequality index, scored no worse than average. Equity was not sacrificed for quality or vice versa.

Apologists will find excuses for these outcomes; immigrants pull down U.S. scores, it will be said, overlooking the fact that other countries have immigrants too. Lifelong learning opportunities are greater in the United States than elsewhere, it will be claimed, so young folks will eventually reach the levels of the oldest group.

But such excuses don't ring true. **All signs point to a deterioration in the quality of American schools.** Europeans and Asians alike have rapidly expanded their educational systems over the last fifty years. In the United States stagnation if not decline has been apparent at least since the seventies. Even our high school graduation rates are lower today than they were a decade ago.

Do we care? Economists tell us that human capital is more important than physical capital for long-term economic development. Weak educational systems won't ruin the country overnight, but prolonged incompetence will eventually prove consequential.

— *Paul E. Peterson*

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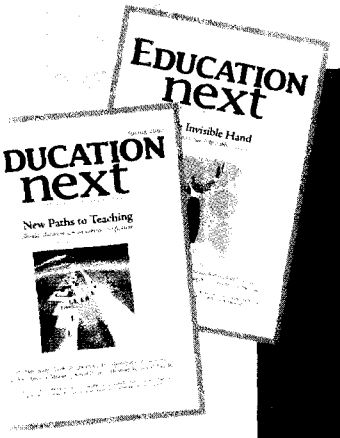

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